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**FIRE THIS TIME**

In English / En Español

**US/ISRAEL HANDS OFF IRAN!**



**NO ATTACK ON IRAN!**

**NO SANCTIONS ON IRAN!**

# ***The Case of the Cuban 5***



**Ramón Labaniño**



**René González**



**Antonio Guerrero**



**Gerardo Hernández**



**Fernando González**

**WHY HAS THE U.S. GOVERNMENT IMPRISONED  
THESE 5 ANTI-TERRORIST HEROES FOR 10 YEARS?**



# it's true, believe it - Canada is an imperialist country and with the U.S. is responsible for the killing of thousands of people in Iraq and Afghanistan

*By Nita Palmer*

On September 6th hundreds gathered at Canadian Forces Base Trenton to witness the return of the bodies of three more Canadian soldiers killed in Canada's war drive in Afghanistan. Just days before the end of their tour of duty, Corporal Mike Seggie, Corporal Andrew Grenon, and Private Chad Horn became the 95<sup>th</sup>, 96<sup>th</sup>, and 97<sup>th</sup> Canadian soldiers to be killed in Afghanistan when their convoy was attacked in the Zhari district of southern Afghanistan. Their deaths were followed four days later by the death of Sergeant Prescott Shipway, bringing the total Canadian Forces fatalities in Afghanistan to 98. The deaths of these four men

year.

Meanwhile in Iraq, over 1.2 million civilians have been killed in five years of war. Despite claims by US President George W. Bush and others that the recent "troop surge" in Iraq has brought more stability and security to Iraqi people, death and destruction remain the order of the day. For example, many Iraqi parents have pulled their children out of school because it is simply too dangerous to attend. Quoted in a September 15th report by UNICEF, Zuhail Sultan, a music student in Baghdad said, "We were 35 students and now we are seven - two girls and five boys, and we don't have enough teachers to cover every subject". In the same article, journalist and author George Packer explains, "Daily life is so difficult, so constrained by fear of assassination, kidnapping, bombing, that to continue to do something as simple as go to school and study music is heroic." Such is life in occupied Iraq.

the beginnings of a major economic crisis. With the recent bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, the 4<sup>th</sup> largest investment bank in the US, and the US Federal Reserve spending billions of dollars to stave off the collapse of major firms like AIG, Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, the US can no longer hide the crisis of her rapid declining economy - a crisis which has had reverberations across the entire world. This economic crisis has hit working people in the US through, most notably, a five-year high in unemployment rates, which now sit at 6.1% officially, up from 5.7% last year, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

Canada has not escaped this crisis either. In the last year alone, tens of thousands of jobs have been cut across the country. 2,000 Air Canada workers lost their jobs. At the GM plant in Oshawa, Ontario, 2,600 jobs were cut. Across BC, too, thousands of forestry workers have been laid off indefinitely, to give just a few examples.

At previous points in history when imperial-

The future that the US envisions for Iraq is not one of a "liberated" Iraqi people. It is one of an Iraq with a puppet government that will do the US' bidding. It is one of an Iraq that will be a permanent base for US presence in the Middle East. This is why the largest US embassy in the world is being constructed in Iraq, and why, whatever the cost, the US continues its occupation.

But the US has been unable to consolidate its occupation there, because Iraqis won't let them. Whatever the US government may say about the "success" of last year's troop surge and about beginning to pull troops out, Iraqis will keep fighting until their one, clear, simple demand is met: OUT NOW! "Great peril still remains... fighting still lays ahead" were US Defense Secretary Robert Gates' words of caution to General Raymond Odierno, the incoming commander of US troops in Iraq. But the US is waist-deep in mud in Iraq: blocked by the Iraqi people, they cannot move forward, and blocked behind by an



followed the deaths of five others in August – the deadliest month of 2008 for Canadian Forces.

South of the border in Williamsburg, Tennessee, friends and family were holding a funeral for 25-year-old Sergeant David Keith Cooper – just one of growing thousands of funerals held across the US for the 4,168 US soldiers killed so far in the US-led war in Iraq.

But the tragedy of war does not end at 98 Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan, or at the nearly 4,200 US soldiers killed in Iraq. While families and friends of Canadian soldiers watched their loved ones come home in body bags, the community of Azizabad in Herat, Afghanistan was mourning the deaths of 90 people, 60 of them children, who were killed in a US-led air strike on August 22<sup>nd</sup>.



Protest in Sadr City, Baghdad against US Defense Secretary Robert Gates visit September 2008

The terror of air strikes like this one has become a sick fact of daily life in Afghanistan. According to Human Rights Watch, civilian deaths from US and NATO air strikes in Afghanistan have nearly tripled over the past

## War and Cruelty at Home

While the governments of Canada and the US are feeding their ever-hungry military machines never-ending dollars for war, the populations of their own countries are increasingly starved of funding for health care, education, and other vital services. The US has spent over *three trillion dollars* on the war in Iraq. Meanwhile, 46.6 million people in their own country are without health insurance (US Census Bureau). A report by the Institute of Medicine estimated that 18,000 people in the US die unnecessarily each year simply because they lack health insurance, and therefore access to health care. To add insult to injury, US soldiers returning from Iraq, often with severe physical injuries or psychological disorders, are finding that veteran's hospitals are closed, under-staffed, and unable to meet their needs.

In Canada, the official count of the costs of the war in Afghanistan are \$8.1Billion – that's \$8.1Billion taxpayer dollars that have been poured into a brutal war instead of into the much-needed funds of health care and education here in Canada. Grossly under-funded public health care is failing to meet the basic needs of the population, with crowded, under-funded and under-staffed hospitals often having fewer beds than patients. In terms of education, in BC alone \$50Million in funding was cut to post-secondary education in 2008. Rural communities

across Canada are also seeing their elementary and high schools closed one by one.

The attacks on working people in Iraq, Afghanistan, Canada and the US come amid

ist countries like Canada, the US, the UK, France, and Japan have faced major internal and world-wide economic crisis, they have responded by going to war with each other directly in an attempt to increase their access to markets and resources. But today's wars are even more cruel and criminal than WWI (1914-1918) and WWII (1939-1945). Today, rather than attacking each other directly, rivaling imperialist countries bring their war and occupation to third world countries, in an attempt to grab more land, more resources, and more new trade markets than their imperialist rivals. The victims in these wars are always the same: working people in imperialist countries as well as oppressed countries under attack.

## Iraq: Without a Hopeful Future

Since the 2003 invasion, the US has been destroying Iraq's past – demolishing without a second thought some of humanity's first libraries and museums, art and architecture which were the history of a people. They destroyed Iraq's education system – one of the best in the Middle East before 2003. They destroyed hospitals and schools, parks and roadways. They tried to destroy a people.

Now, the US is destroying Iraq's future. How can any country advance when a foreign occupation is destroying all the civilization you had built up previously? How can any country advance when its young people are unable to go to school? How can any country have a future when its population is constantly exposed to the radioactive remnants of depleted uranium bombs, which will render much of the population unable to have children?

In occupied Iraq today, just 32% of Iraqis have access to clean drinking water, and only 19% have access to a good sewage system, according to Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources. 15% of children in Iraq suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder induced by the war – a disorder which Iraq's fractured health care system has been unable to cope with.



economic crisis that they are desperately trying to solve through this war drive, they do not want to pull out.

## Afghanistan: The Situation is Worsening

Afghanistan today is a country in crisis for Afghans as well as for the occupation forces. All the grand promises of "human rights", "women's rights" and "democracy" have proven themselves to be nothing but lies. Human rights in Afghanistan? The fundamental human right is the right to be alive – a right that the Canada/NATO occupation forces violate every day with their air strikes and civilian shootings. Women's rights in Afghanistan? Since March 2008 alone, 100 women have committed suicide by lighting themselves on fire in southwestern Afghanistan alone (The Guardian). Democracy in Afghanistan? The so-called 'democratically elected' government of Hamid Karzai is nothing but a servant of the occupation forces. His government authority cannot go further than the suburbs of Afghanistan's capital, Kabul. In Afghanistan people joke that he is the mayor of Kabul. Despite his occasional condemnation of the occupation

*continued on page 18*



## Introduction By Tamara Hansen\*



Canadian Network on Cuba  
[www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca](http://www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca)

The letter below is an important appeal for donations towards relief and reconstruction in Cuba after Hurricanes Gustav, Hannah and Ike. Written by Keith Ellis (professor, author, poet and chair of the Cuba Hurricane Fund Committee of the Canadian Network on Cuba -CNC) on September 2nd 2008 after the destruction of Hurricane Gustav and then updated on September 16th after Cuba was hit by Hurricane Ike. This passionate letter is both an appeal for funds and an important letter announcing the high spirit and determination of the Cuban people to reconstruct and rebuild their devastated homes, hospitals, schools and other infrastructure. As the people of Cuba and the Cuban government are uniting and rebuilding their country, we must lend a supporting hand!

As outlined below, donations for Cuba Hurricane relief are being accepted by local Cuba solidarity groups and will be contributed to the national campaign to raise funds, organized by the Canadian Network on Cuba.

There are two ways to make a donation (tax deductible receipts are available for people in Canada):

1- If you are in Vancouver, BC: mail your cheque payable to "Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba" with your name, address and phone number, clearly stating "For Cuba Hurricane Relief". These donations will be added together with other donations from Vancouver and sent with a list of the names, addresses, phone numbers and the amount of the donation of the individual donors to the Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund (Registered charitable organization # 88876 9197). Then send cheques to: PO Box 56067, 1st Ave RPO, 1690 Nanaimo Street, Vancouver, BC, Canada, V5L 5E2

2- If you are outside of Vancouver: send your cheque made payable to the "Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund", clearly stating "For Cuba Hurricane Relief" on the memo line, together with your name, address and telephone number. Envelopes should be addressed to: Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund, Attn: S. Skup, Treasurer, 56 Riverwood Terrace, Bolton, Ontario, L7E 1S4

\*Tamara Hansen is the coordinator of VCSC, as well as Co-chair of the Canadian Network on Cuba.

By Keith Ellis

# Cuba Hurricane Relief & Re-Construction Campaign

*In just over a week, Gustav, Hannah & then Ike*



Pinar del Río August 2008

hurricanes Gustav and Ike. It makes for sobering reading. The total damage is estimated at \$5 billion and can rise, with more than 440,000 homes damaged, more than 63,000 totally destroyed. For details on agriculture/businesses/ infrastructure, etc, the extensive report is available at:

which involved moving a quarter of a million people to safe shelter—not a single life was lost during Hurricane Gustav. Five lobster fishermen who were missing at sea for a time were found after an intensive air and sea search. For Ike, almost a quarter of the whole population of Cuba

being shipped to affected areas from provinces that were better supplied, linemen were arriving in Pinar del Río from Santiago to work "as long as is necessary," and public health brigades were ensuring salutary conditions. Building materials were being distributed to those who needed repairs to their homes. The energy revolution has introduced technologies that have resulted in speeding up the restoration of electricity after damage to the grid. The presidents of the Defense Councils of Pinar del Río and Isla de la Juventud, both women, were received in the various communities they visited, with cheerful demonstrations of confidence in them and the Revolutionary government.

A badly damaged hospital in one of the communities in Pinar del Río was the place of birth of a boy during the hurricane. He was named Gustavo for the hurricane and David for the Cuban people's spirit of fighting against great odds.

That fighting spirit must also be imbued with the patience of Sisyphus, because the

unwanted meteorological phenomenon stubbornly recurs. A previous CNC donation went precisely to one of the again affected Pinar del Río communities to provide roofs for some 200 houses. We hope that some of these roofs have survived. The fighting spirit must also be buttressed by financial resources.

Even though Cuba has not requested aid from us, the friends of Cuba, including members of the Canadian Network on Cuba, will want, as they usually do, to do everything possible to help.

Cuba has been helping other countries for years; now let us help them.

Help by signing a petition to the Canadian Federal government to send Hurricane Aid to Cuba. Go to the website for Canadians: [www.gopetition.co.uk/petitions/hurricane-aid-for-cuba.html](http://www.gopetition.co.uk/petitions/hurricane-aid-for-cuba.html) Please pass the info on; also write your MP.

With your help — in view of the great expense — we should imaginatively seek out new additional sources of funds—from different levels of government, farmer's associations, trade unions, cultural groups—and in general widen the circle of the friends of Cuba. We should work to include people who are indignant at injustice, those who understand, for example, that one of the main reasons why the Bush administration let some of its citizens die rather than accept Cuban medical help at the time of Katrina was because they



Dear Friends,

Gustav and Ike have caused the worst storm damage in Cuba's history. As you already know, Cuba has once more suffered the fierce attack of a hurricane. This one, Gustav, is considered to be the most devastating in the last forty years. Having caused severe flooding in its early stages in eastern Cuba, it grew in strength and size in the warm Caribbean waters and, after demolishing the special municipality of the Isle of Youth with its awful force, invaded Pinar del Río, Cuba's most westerly province. By this time it had achieved a diameter of some 450 kilometers with the most destructive winds and rains packed into the eastern side of the monster. Although Pinar del Río bore the brunt of the damage, ravaged by sustained winds of 240 kph, with gusts as high as 350 kph, the area of damage extended to include the provinces of Havana, City of Havana and Matanzas. Update: One week later Hurricane Ike also hit Cuba and traveled lengthwise across the whole island causing great damage.

UN assessment is 4 to 6 billion in damages for Cuba. The Cuban government has issued their preliminary estimate of the damage wrought by

[www.granma.cubaweb.cu/2008/09/16/nacional/artic03.html](http://www.granma.cubaweb.cu/2008/09/16/nacional/artic03.html)

The damage touched all sectors of the economic and social life of various regions, and with Ike — the whole island. In large parts of Pinar del Río and Isla de la Juventud, houses, schools, hospitals and other public buildings that weren't demolished, lost their roofs or suffered other kinds of damage. This means that warehouses that stored supplies and commodities such as rice, sugar, flour, tobacco, could not avoid exposing them to the elements. Cultural and recreational facilities were damaged or destroyed. Ferris wheels were turned into mangled metal, as were transmission towers used for electricity or communications. Damaged high-tension power lines, roads and bridges added to the toll. The agricultural sector has suffered severely. Hundreds of hectares of bananas fell early, as did citrus fruit. Sugar cane was massively affected, and sophisticated irrigation equipment was ruined. The part of the fishing industry based in the Isla de la Juventud was gravely hurt.

The good news is that—thanks to the precautionary measures, in which Cuba leads the world and

was evacuated. Five died with Hurricane Ike and for Cuba that's a very high total.

Cuba, like other Caribbean countries and parts of the United States, occupies a geographical space that is in the path of hurricanes. This space is now more prone than ever to disastrous hurricanes as a result of climate change. Hardly had Gustav passed than Hanna and Ike appeared on the weather map like a caravan of doom. Cuba is the country least to be blamed for the deteriorating climatic conditions that fuel hurricanes. Let us remember that when the World Wildlife Fund in 2006 evaluated countries, human development and environmental protection, they found that Cuba was the only country that met the criteria.

Hurricanes will continue to batter Cuba. The island can frustrate them only to a certain extent, chiefly through deepening scientific knowledge of their behaviour and the achievement of a social organization based on solidarity, trust, egalitarianism and fairness.

The day after Gustav passed the civil defense plans were put into immediate action - involving the whole island to help the devastated areas. Roads were being cleared and swept, food was

wanted no easing of their brutal 'embargo,' and even when Cuba is faced with terrible natural disasters. Let us approach Canadians with some of the information here and, as José Martí would do, believe in their goodness.

The need for funds to recover from Hurricane Gustav and Ike is urgent. We aim to forward to Cuba an initial contribution of \$100,000 as soon as possible. We hope that in this hour of Cuba's need, you will find it possible to respond in a spirit that reflects the generosity and determination of the Cuban people.

One hundred per cent of your donation will go to Cuba either directly or in obtaining and shipping requested materials to help in the re-construction. The charitable organization "Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund" (Registered Canadian charitable organization # 88876 9197) is working with us to collect donations for Cuba Hurricane Relief and Re-Construction from concerned Canadians. Either way, you will receive a charitable tax receipt:

There are two ways to send in donations.

1) Send your cheque made payable to the "Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund." Then write on the memo line of the cheque "For Cuba Hurricane Relief." Also include your name, address if it is not already on the cheque so a tax receipt can be issued (or state that a tax receipt is not needed). Mail to: Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund Attn: S. Skup, Treasurer, 56 Riverwood Terrace, Bolton, Ontario, L7E 1S4 (tel: 905.951.8499 sharon@ccfatoronto.ca)

If you do not want any receipt, you also can go to any TD Canada Trust branch and deposit money to the account of the Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund: (Institution # 004; Transit # 03212) Branch # 321 Acct# 5001074.

2) Make out your cheque (or cash) to your local Cuba friendship/solidarity committee with your name, address, clearly stating "For Cuba Hurricane Relief." The local committee will send one cheque - together with a list of the names, addresses, and the amount of the donation of the individual donors - to the Mackenzie-Papineau Memorial Fund. Tax receipts will then be issued to individual donors (unless stated as not needed). A list of provincial groups is available on the CNC website.

Yours in solidarity,

Keith Ellis,  
Chair Cuba Hurricane Fund Committee, Canadian Network on Cuba

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If you find Fire This Time to be an effective tool in the struggle of oppressed people for justice, more than ever, we need your support. On top of our regular costs of production, we regularly send members of our editorial board on assignment throughout North America, the Caribbean and beyond in order to make Fire This Time a better resource. These efforts have strained our finances.

If you would like to help with a donation, please make cheques payable to "Nita Palmer"

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# INTERVIEW WITH Sabreena Da Witch and DAM

## Pioneers of Palestinian Hip Hop

By Alison Bodine

*Since its birth in the United States, hip hop has become an international form of resistance to war, racism and oppression. Emerging out of the black and Latino struggle, hip hop soon spread to all corners of the globe. From Latin America to Africa to the Middle East, hip hop is the voice of young people fighting for justice.*



**Sabreena Da Witch**

*In Palestine, the hip hop movement has exploded over the last few years. What began as only a few groups is now a phenomenon all over occupied Palestine. Fire This Time was lucky enough to be able to interview some of the pioneers of Palestinian hip hop this spring. They were in*

why I see myself as a witch.

**FTT: What brought you to hip-hop and music?**

**ABEER:** There is a cliché saying that hip hop came to me, but it is true that it found me. I was singing always like songs in R&B and I never knew what it was. I was told “you sound like Mary J Blige” and “you sound like Lauryn Hill”, and I started looking - like I know them, but what does it mean “sounds like” them? Then I figured out it’s R&B, Rhythm and Blues, and I decided that I would do it in Arabic and see how it would go. I started officially working in the Palestinian hip hop scene with DAM in the video “Born Here”, which you can find on Youtube. Since then I didn’t stop – 2002 - still going.

**FTT: So you met DAM in Palestine. Did you grow up in Palestine?**

**ABEER:** I grew up with them. We were all born in Lod, a city in the center of Palestine, 20 minutes from Tel Aviv, 40 minutes from Jerusalem. It’s horrible there, as soon as you



**DAM ~ Da Arabian MCs**

women in the hip hop scene well, I am here to tell you first of all, I am not the first one and I am not the last one. There are so many there struggling to do it and they are making it thank God.

**FTT: What is the main thing that you try and express when you are on tour in the US or Canada, countries that play a major role in supporting the Israeli occupation?**

**ABEER:** I feel like my responsibility is to come and change all of the stereotypes people have about Arab women and Muslim women. Cuz it’s really wrong. I know that there are a lot of people out there that try to break the stereotypes against Arabs and Muslims. My role is to come and say that women are stronger then you think, you know, it’s not what you see

**TAMER:** I was alone, and then we became three. Then we became two groups. Now it is everywhere, we have Arabic film festivals, besides that DAM is doing a lot of Palestinian festivals. DAM is one of the icons over there, we are the big ones. The big Palestinian icons, we are getting bigger and bigger and now it is all around the world.

**FTT: What is the popularity of hip hop in Palestine today? What is the difference in music or popularity between the West Bank and Gaza, inside Israel and in the Palestinian Diaspora? Is hip hop as popular in Gaza as it is in other parts of occupied Palestine?**

**TAMER:** It is very popular in Gaza. And you have a lot of groups over there as well, most of them. In the West Bank, like Ramallah, it



*San Francisco performing at a music festival in commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of Al Nakba- "The Catastrophe," when the occupation of Palestine by Israel began, displacing millions of Palestinians from their homes and livelihoods.*

*DAM- Da Arab MC's as they are known in the United States, and MC Sabreena Da Witch are some of the first Palestinians to use hip hop as a tool for resistance and opposition to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. They continue to be part of the social justice and anti-occupation movement in Palestine, and have also been able to travel internationally to share their message and their struggle. For more information about their music, go to [www.dam-palestine.com](http://www.dam-palestine.com), or [www.myspace.com/sdwitch](http://www.myspace.com/sdwitch).*

#### Interview with Sabreena Da Witch

**FTT: Can you please introduce yourself?**

**ABEER:** My name is Abeer A-B-E-E-R and my stage name is Sabreena the Witch, double "ee", it's not Sabrina the blond teenager witch. Sabreena in Arabic means patient, and Palestinians are a strong, patient people who have been suffering for 60 years and still have not given up, and that is why we are witches. I believe that all women are witches. The women's struggle started a long time ago with the witches in Salem and to me all women's struggle is one, and that is



get into Lod you can see the Arab neighborhoods and the Jewish neighborhoods. The Jewish neighborhoods are beautiful and European. The Arab neighborhoods are just refugee camps in Israel. Mahmoud from DAM is my cousin and Tamer and Suhell are my best friends. We grew up together, so it was natural that we work together right away.

**FTT: How have you seen hip hop grow since you got involved in Palestine?**

**ABEER:** I mean, oh my God! It is so big I cannot even explain or describe it to you. It is really huge in all ages, women, thank God, in all regions. In Gaza today, there are hundreds of crews, thousands of crews, there are so many people doing this you can't even tell. It is huge and it is the real hip hop, what hip hop used to be in the Bronx a few decades ago.

**FTT: What do you think it is about hip hop, why now hip hop in Palestine?**

**ABEER:** First of all, why not? Second of all, hip hop is the universal revolution music. If you don't use it... it's like rock n' roll in the 60's. You want to talk about something, you want to express your feelings, you have to use it. It is so tough, sometimes I feel that just the beats get your anger right out, you know they love it. It's not violent. A lot of people describe hip hop as a violent music, but I think hip hop is a tool for Palestinians. It is a tool for us to get to the world, express ourselves and burn the system. 'Cuz it's hip hop, that what it is. It's doing things. When you are hip hopper, a hip hop artist, people are going to know right away you do stuff in the streets. You work with people, you talk with people, you help people, ya know, it's not just another form of art, it's bigger than that.

**FTT: What can you say about the role of women in the Palestinian hip hop scene right now? Have you seen that grow and develop?**

**ABEER:** I am always being asked that. Where are the Arab women, and the Palestinian

on TV, what the system and the media try to feed you. Today you have seen me and another two women on stage, Noura Erakat and Maysoon Ziyad, and we are just a small example of the huge women's movement in Palestine. Maysoon, she is right here, is a walking community saver. She helps kids in Palestine face to face, she goes there and helps the people there, giving them stuff in their hand, the real help that they need, not clichés on TV. These are the real women. We are here to show, we are good, we are Palestinian, we're amazing and we're strong, we are actually doing it. We don't care as much about being famous and getting known and being paid, we actually care about doing things in the street, and this is what women are all about. This is what women are all about, always and forever.

**FTT: Thank you Abeer.**

#### Interview with Tamer of Da Arabian MCs DAM

**FTT: Can you introduce yourself?**

**TAMER:** My name is Tamer Nafar, I am part of DAM.

**FTT: Can you tell me about the emergence of DAM, how you came to hip hop and how DAM started?**

**TAMER:** I didn't understand English personally. It was the footage from the hip hop clips. I am talking about Tupac basically. Even though it was in English, it spoke to me more than Arab love songs. So I started writing rhymes and rap. One day, I just decided to do that and record it, my brother came to the studio and did the hook. Then we released a small album, like five or six songs, and we became DAM.

**FTT: What has been the development of Palestinian hip hop over the last few years, when did it first emerge and how has it grown?**

is so developed, people love it. It is all over Palestine.

**FTT: What is the connection of hip hop and the Palestinian struggle? What do you think the role of hip hop is in the struggle against the occupation?**

**TAMER:** I can only talk about me. If I was drawing, I would draw about Palestine. I am doing hip hop, so I do it about Palestine. Connection, if you want to take it to the way that hip hop started here, then there is a minority, occupation, slavery, they resemble. It is a tool for people who want to say something and don't have TV channels. People who want to say something, people who want to initiate something, they don't have the government for that. That's hip hop for me.

**FTT: Is there anything you want to say to people fighting against the occupation in the United States or in Canada? Is there anything that you are trying to bring to the stage when you perform outside of Palestine?**

**TAMER:** Get the album, that's what I can say. Go to [DAMPalestine.com](http://DAMPalestine.com) and get the album. There is a lot of messages. I cannot be like, "Free Palestine"! It is deeper than that. It is free Palestine, free ourselves from occupation, we have occupied ourselves. We have gotten ourselves into this...we like being victims. We talk about change, changing the world, like change needed for women's rights. We are talking about initiations, not only in America festivals for us, but Arab countries have to do something for us. Enough of doing 80% for European shows and only 10% for Arabs. Initiate, start to be more of an activist. There are a lot of messages, it cannot just be Free Palestine and that's it. Even if you are a Palestinian, it does not mean that that's it, you are a good rapper. In the album, you have the whole thing over there.

**FTT: Thank you Tamer.**

# Our Response was ‘Bring it On!’



By Aaron Mercredi,  
Kerri Goodwin  
& Maria Aksic

*Sam McKay is a councillor for the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig (KI) First Nation. On March 17th 2008, he was arrested for contempt of court, along with five other KI community leaders, including Chief Donny Morris. Their crime was that they stood up to an aggressive junior exploration company, Platinex, by not allowing it to enter their lands for exploration activities. After two months, the group that came to be known as the KI-6 were released from jail after a successful appeal of their*

Calmwind. I'm also a member of KI.

**FTT: Can you tell us about your community?**

**SM:** We're situated in the remote North of Ontario, about 500 miles North of Thunder Bay. It's a fly-in community. There are no roads and you can only travel by plane, other than during the winter road season, which for maybe six weeks or so, you can drive in or out.

**FTT: What were the circumstances around your arrest?**

**SM:** We didn't allow an exploratory company, Platinex, to do their exploratory drilling

**February 2006?**

**SM:** Well, we found out that they were already setting up camp at the site. They were all ready to bring in their drilling equipment. That's when the community found out, that it was already at that stage and the chief and council members went and informed them that they weren't welcome on our territory and asked them to leave. There's a lot of things that happened and it didn't happen right away. It took awhile. Eventually in April we received notice that we were being sued for \$10Billion. I said 'Wow, what is that?' (laughs)

**LC:** After Platinex was asked to leave the territory they turned around and sued the community for \$10Billion. I think they were expecting to make that much in revenue if they were allowed to explore for profit. That's what I assume anyway.

**SM:** That's what they said anyway. There's documentation that their claim is only worth \$600,000, so I don't know where they got the \$10Billion from. It was just an intimidation tactic.

**FTT: When you and the other council members were arrested, what was it like for the people who were back at the community dealing with the fact that their elected leadership was sitting in**

to them or set up meetings and stuff like that. So it didn't really disrupt in the terms of doing our business in the community. Although there was an impact, the impact was initially felt, but it started to stabilize, so they weren't able to affect us that way. Even INAC (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada) was also trying to say that they weren't leaders, you know.

**SM:** INAC came out and said they wouldn't recognize us as leaders. Because right at the time when we were arrested we were supposed to sign an amended agreement with INAC. Then we got thrown in jail and the next day that issue came up whether we could sign or not and the person that was representing INAC said we couldn't.

**LC:** I think what happened there is Ontario got a lot of pressure from the social justice organizations in their own province. There was a lot of support from those groups. Also from other groups that are protesting the Mining Act. The Mining Act for the pre-entry system was also affecting other coalitions and other environmental groups, so there was a collaborative effort of a lot of organizations putting pressure



Indigenous Rights and Action Project organizer Kerri Goodwin (C) with members of the KI nation Laura Calmwind (L) and Sam McKay (R)





convictions and by the mounting public pressure across Canada. With the struggle far from over, the people of KI continue to fight for their inherent rights over their traditional territory, to keep it free from plundering by mining companies and the governments of Ontario and Canada. Fire This Time had an opportunity to sit down and talk with Sam McKay, along with KI community member, Laura Calmwind, about their ongoing struggle at the recent Indigenous Environmental Network conference in Western Shoshone territory, Nevada.

**Fire This Time:** First, can you tell us who you are and where you're from?

**Sam McKay:** My name is Sam McKay. I'm from Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI).

**Laura Calmwind:** I'm Laura

on our traditional territory. The provincial government had given them the permit to go ahead and do the drilling. Then, we had asked them to leave. Then, they turned around and sued us for \$10Billion, and eventually they charged us with contempt for not obeying a court order that was given by Justice Smith in Thunder Bay Superior Court, and allowing them to come in to drill, and ordering us not to interfere. We didn't obey that order. So they found us in contempt.

**FTT:** How long has this struggle with Platinex and the government of Ontario been going on for?

**LC:** Since the 1980s, they started exploring in that territory. Kind of picking out some areas they would like to explore, it kind of started back then. But it never came to a head until February 2006.

**FTT:** What happened in

prison?

**SM:** Well, there was a bit of turmoil. We tried to prepare the community for the worst because we knew it was going to come to this. And we tried to inform them what to expect, on how to react if it did happen. We also set up a working group cross-section of community members to work in

conjunction with the three council members that were left behind. There was a question as to whether we were to still be recognized as leaders when we were behind bars, but then the community had a meeting the day after we got arrested. They had a meeting and the outcome was that we were still the leaders. That's the statement that the community put out, that we were still their recognized community leaders.

**LC:** The place they were incarcerated was close to Thunder Bay. So there are a number of us that live in Thunder Bay, the KI members that live in Thunder Bay, so we formed ourselves into a working group to support the community and the leadership that was incarcerated. So we opened up an office there, the KI sub-office. We continued to do business as usual with chief and council. We would take documentation

Our response was 'BRING IT ON!' (chuckles)

**LC:** We went ahead and took the documents to them behind bars, me and my brother did. They just signed all of it. We don't need anyone else to sign them. Those are our leaders.

**FTT:** There is a very strong connection between the case of the KI-6 and Robert Lovelace of the Ardoch Algonquin. Do you think these cases have affected the way the governments of Ontario and Canada will approach future resource and land grabs like this, when they see the response that the people will stand up?

**SM:** I think that they will, yeah, to a certain extent. But exactly to what extent they will is yet to be seen.

on the provincial government to release KI. But we also got a lot of support from other First Nations across Canada. And plus, the international community was also supporting us. So, Ontario got a lot of pressure, and after that Canada got a lot of pressure because KI went as far as going to the United Nations and making a presentation and interventions, and there was some feedback from there. There was a lady from Switzerland.

**SM:** Switzerland. And she went to meet with the leader of the Green Party in Switzerland. They went to the legislature and they pressured that government to pressure the Canadian government to release us. We didn't even know that this was going on.

*continued on page 15*



By Shakeel Lochan

*"Well, a lot of people within government and big business are nervous of Hip Hop and Hip Hop artists, because they speak their minds. They talk about what they see and what they feel and what they know. They reflect what's around them."*

- Afrika Bambaataa

*"I've been observing this system at every level and every rebel refusin' to settle be catchin' metal, I swear they sit back and revel in all they devilin' with all they foreign country meddlin', pot callin the kettlin', mass destruction weapon peddling just let it settle in, they ain't been fightin' fair since Chris Columbus nestled in"*

-(Fight Back) Son of Nun

The climate that tore Hip Hop out of its womb in the early 1970's was one of racism, poverty and gentrification. Conditions in the Bronx and across the US at that time have degenerated even further today, across the whole world. Today's global outlook is one of economic instability with increased competition between advanced capitalist countries like Canada and the US for consolidation of markets. Starvation, joblessness, homelessness, and dissolving of social programs are some of the major issues in so-called first world



# VANCOUVER CELEBRATES HIP HOP AGAINST WAR AND OCCUPATION!

countries, while the plunder of the Third World is increasing at a frenetic rate. On the home front, attacks on poor people attempting to respond to worsening conditions also increase. Just since 2001, there have been the wars and subsequent occupations of Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti and Somalia, equaling up to at least 2 million civilian deaths, with widespread shortages of clean drinking water, electricity, food and shelter. Ongoing justifications to these imperialist campaigns are the lies that were spread about why and how these campaigns were undertaken and what their true impact was. The Canadian ruling class heralded

world today is fostering a rising tide of talented artists. From occupied Palestine come artists like DAM, whose lyrics speak about their love for their people and their boiling rage at the 60 year Israeli occupation of their home, forcing them to live as 2<sup>nd</sup> class humans. British pioneers Asian Dub Foundation have spoke about Islamophobia, the demonization of South Asian and Arab communities since the late 1980's, taking part in various political actions across the world. The Narcysist, an Iraqi-Arab MC who came out of the critically acclaimed Montreal group Euphrates has spoken about the occupation and deci-

of Cuban culture." Fidel Castro himself went to say that Hip Hop was "at the vanguard of the revolution," recognizing its ability to strengthen community unity and foster the exchange of ideas and critical thinking amongst restless youth. Hip Hop was seen as having the ability to bridge the gap between the Cuban generations that lived through the beginning stages of the revolution and the generation that came

Hip Hop are strangely akin to the criticisms of Third World countries by the ruling classes of countries like Canada (criticisms which eventually serve as justification for the occupation of said countries). The right to self-determination or respect of national sovereignty is ignored by the ruling classes of powerful nations, in their quests, disguised in a consistent barrage of claims of, establishing security, instilling democracy, establishing rights for women or



Maglia Lopez  
Director of l'Agencia Cubana de Rap





itself as peacekeepers in Afghanistan, while the US ruling class placed itself as head of a coalition of the willing in Iraq, bringing 'democracy' with air-strikes, house-to-house raids and tanks. Today the latest and most significant target of US imperialism is Iran. With already three sets of economic sanctions placed against the country, and massive US forces off the coast of the Persian Gulf, the US hypocritically claims that Iran is a threat to the world due in part to it exercising its sovereign right to enrich uranium.

### **Hip Hop and the Third World**

Meanwhile, Hip Hop has expanded its reach across the world, encompassing issues of war and occupation, taking on new forms since its inception in diverse international communities with their own stories of hardship and struggle respective to their regions.

The Middle East being the primary war-torn region in the

mation of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Much like the American ghetto, the Canadian reservation and the urban poor areas are the scene of marginalized Indigenous youth who face poverty, violence, and systemic oppression. Today the ongoing theft of land and denial of Indigenous sovereignty are a continuation of Canada's genocidal project. This struggle against this injustice has been mainlined into Indigenous arts and culture. Acts like the War Party, Team Rezofficial, Eekwol, Manik 1derful, Os12 and 7<sup>th</sup> Generation have all helped built a solid foundation of Indigenous Hip Hop, each bringing their own experiences in struggle and working closely with the youth in their communities.

### **Hip Hop and Cuba**

Hip Hop exploded into the Cuban scene in the mid 1990's. Perhaps the most important factor within Cuban Hip Hop is its endorsement first by the Asociación Hermanos Saíz (Cuban cultural association related to the Union of Young Communists) and eventually the formation of the government agency La Agencia Cubana de Rap (Cuban Rap Agency), both of which seek to sustain and promote Cuban culture, with the Cuban Rap Agency specifically focusing on Cuban Hip Hop. The Cuban Rap Agency was created in 2002, preceded by the Minister of Culture Abel Prieto declaring Hip Hop as an "authentic expression

afterwards.

When asked about the role of Hip Hop in Cuban society, Ariel Fernandez (DJ Asho), who organized with Asociación Hermanos Saiz and later was appointed National Hip Hop Promoter, explained, "the social role [Hip Hop] is playing is very important, Cuban rap is criticizing the deficiencies that exist in society, but in a constructive way, educating youth and opening spaces to create a better society."

The frontlines of Cuban Hip Hop take on topics from the stifling 48+ year US economic blockade on Cuba, to sexism, poverty, and homophobia. Key Cuban talent includes groups like Grupo Uno, Obsesion (group member - Magia Lopez is Director of the Cuban Agency of Rap, and a heavily involved feminist organizer), Anónimo Consejo, and Las Krudas (an Afro-Cuban lesbian duo).

### **Hip Hop Under Attack**

Some wax poetic about a "golden age" of Hip Hop, and speak about the corruption of the culture. This is rooted in an attempt to corrode collective progress and assumes that Hip Hop exists in bubble immune to the problems that exist in the whole of society. Critics try to cloud the fact that Hip Hop culture has become a means of escape, expression and coping mechanism within a rapidly destabilizing world economy. Criticisms of

even bringing freedom to the people. As if carpet-bombs and depleted uranium were the new doves!

### **Hip Hop as the Voice of the Oppressed**

Just as the governments of imperialist countries want to shut down the significant unity in struggle that is arising in direct response to their invasions and occupations, so do they want to strangle any and all forces that have the energy to galvanize and inspire oppressed people. Hip Hop does in fact encompass the good, bad and the ugly in our collective societies, but more importantly it reflects the potential of oppressed people to come together under common demands. This is the power of Hip Hop and why it spans from Harlem ghettos to Canadian prairie reservations to the open-air prison that is the Gaza Strip to Havana Cuba to... Vancouver, B.C. Canada this September 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Antiwar Hip Hop Festival Against War and Occupation - HIP HOP VERSUS WAR 2008! This two-day festival is returning for its fourth installment and showcase of local and international talent in more than 20 different flavors. It will highlight the five elements of Hip Hop and its roots in social struggle against war and occupation at home and abroad!





# Canadian Democracy in Action: The Tale of Elizabeth May

*By Kira Koshelanyk*

Just one day after Prime Minister Stephen Harper made the announcement that Governor General Michaëlle Jean would dissolve the 39th session of Canadian parliament and call the next general election in Canada, September 8th news headlines clamoured “Green party leader May excluded from televised leaders’ debates”.

Two days later, on September 10<sup>th</sup>, this exclusion against Federal Green Party leader Elizabeth May was lifted. What really happened and why did this happen? What is the significance of this exclusion for poor and working people in Canada? What it means when it comes to ‘democracy’ in Canada is what we need to investigate for a better understanding of how this ‘democratic’ system works.

## What Happened?

In August, the Green Party announced their first Green MP in Parliament, Blair Wilson (a former Liberal turned Independent turned Green). According to a 2006 report by the CBC ombudsman Vince Carlin, ‘indisputable’ criterion for inclusion in televised leaders debates is that the party must have representation in the House of Commons and must show an

up and not follow the rules of those televised debates, which are to rant back and forth but in the end say nothing?

Certainly, they were opposed to the deal May made earlier with Stephane Dion, to manoeuvre against the other parties. It is a competition to get elected, after all, and they are not so friendly as to give the competition more air-time based on goodwill. Either way, in this period of instability for the government and the economy, they wanted to maintain the status quo of how things operate.

People across the country showed their disapproval in the tens of thousands, and maybe hundreds of thousands, in polls and online petitions (including nine different groups, with a total membership of more than 8,000, started on the popular social networking site ‘facebook’ demanding May be allowed to debate). Angry with this unjust decision, massive protest by working people across the country pressured the ruling elites and their political parties, showing that working people are not accepting the exclusion. In other words, the masses reminded the ruling class that ‘democracy’ is the name of the game for these big parties, and therefore breaking their own rules is not acceptable. The big broadcasting corporations and the three party leaders

youth and all other oppressed layers in Canada? Elizabeth May gets to debate – good! But why stop there? If the smaller parties or independent candidates and even civil society organizations representing the interests of different layers and groupings in our society don’t have that same access to free speech, how is this ‘democracy’ working? Above all, democracy is not just simply majority rule, it has to institutionalized minority voice to heard and discussed.

This two-day episode not only exposed the undemocratic move by the three political parties, but also showed the shortcomings of both the Liberal Party and the Green Party when it comes to defending the



a form of government. In actual fact and objectively, it is all above under one state, the capitalist state. The flaw is that in such a complicated socio-economic system, in such a sophisticated political machinery, democracy really has no meaning or value for the ruling class if it is not played in their favour. Depending on the circumstances of the system of capitalist economy, democracy could be played by a two-party system like the US, a handful of party systems like Canada, a multi-party system like Italy, or a completely naked



ability to run candidates in all 308 ridings (the Greens did have 308 candidates in the election held in 2006, according to the same 2006 CBC ombudsman's report). This year when the election was called, the Green party had their first MP sitting in the House of Commons - so by those rules, what's the problem?

Spokespersons for the Broadcast Consortium (the grouping of major broadcast media in Canada, both in French and English - CBC, Radio-Canada, CTV, Global and TVA) stated that three of the four leaders of the four major status quo political parties threatened not to participate if Elizabeth May was also there. It became clear who they were fairly quickly, as Liberal Party leader Stephane Dion defended May's right to participate in the debate. As reported by the Globe and Mail, CBC and other ruling class news sources, the New Democratic Party (NDP), the Conservatives and the Bloc Quebecois cited the Dion-May 'non-compete' agreement made in April of 2007 as one of the main reasons for their opposition. The deal confirms that in the next federal election the Liberals and Greens will not run competing candidates in the riding of the rival party's leader. The NDP and the Bloc Quebecois also complained that the Greens haven't had an MP elected as a Green (Blair Wilson was elected as a Liberal) and therefore they shouldn't be represented in the TV national debate or any joint national debate. Elizabeth May and the Green Party threatened to sue the Consortium. Alas, the pre-election infighting of the status quo parties began.

### **Why was Elizabeth May Excluded?**

Could it be that the other three big party leaders were afraid May would stir things

were forced to back off.

Although the acceptance of Ms. May to the national debate was a victory for working and poor people, in terms of being able to hear all sides, with more careful observation one has to ask: was the exclusion of Elizabeth May/the Green Party the only undemocratic act in these elections? And now that she is one of the debating candidates, has the coming election in Canada has become democratic as a result? However, it also must be said that as far as the working class is concerned, the Green Party missed an historic opportunity to elevate itself to the champion of democracy and democratic rights. The Green Party leader's opposition to the decision was not based on believing in democratic principles—as the thousands of ordinary people showed us by faxing, emailing, petitioning and calling - rather her desire was to be accepted by the Club of Four as a fifth member. Elizabeth May opportunistically manipulated the sincere protest by people for her own rise to the ruling class club.

### **How Democratic is “Democracy” in Canada?**

The question of the momentary exclusion of Elizabeth May/Green Party from the federal leadership debates is really much more than just that. Who else will not be heard and will not be represented in these debates? The Elections Canada website lists 17 officially registered federal political parties, plus two more that are eligible to be registered. The Liberals, NDP, Conservative, Bloc Quebecois and Green Party only account for 5 of them.

What is beyond these 17 officially registered parties? What about the voices of workers, Indigenous people, women,

right to free speech and the right of all political ideas and tendencies to be heard. Liberals defended May's right to free speech, which in essence was correct, even though was not genuine. However, they completely failed to defend the right of the other 12 registered political parties to speak in a national debate, including many socialists and progressive parties. At the same time, the Green Party showed its own shortcomings by defending the right of participation in the debate for its own leader only!

### **One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward**

Latest infighting among these mainstream status quo political parties established two victories for working and poor people. The first is that when the ruling class is in crisis, working and poor people can intervene in the situation and win. The second is that if and when the masses decide to protest, they can establish their will and push the ruling class back from their assault. Working and poor people need to see the whole process very clearly, that 'democracy' is basically a luxury for the ruling class. The democracy we experience in Canada is democracy for the ruling elites. It could be played by us, working and poor people, but only if we accept the rules of the bourgeois and ruling elites' game (meaning accepting the established system of electoral districts, candidate selection, the established 'main' status quo parties, "first past the post" system of vote counting, the necessity of millions of dollars in campaign spending in order to compete and so on).

This also explains another flaw in this so-called democratic Canada: that democracy itself is not just a concept, a structure, an ideology, an institution, or

and direct system like Hitler-Nazi regime. This façade, this luxury called democracy that they represent, only serves the interests of the ruling elites and could be dismantled whenever ruling class sees to fit. Multi-party system or not, the method of decision making process, openness and diversity of ideas, all rules and laws, a real democracy, must serve the interests of the majority, the working and poor people in order to put them in better position to fight for their rights and maintain a higher standard of living. Otherwise, propagating democracy without a practical meaning in terms of no change for better is a deceptive act and is an illusion.

### **The Missing Link in the Chain of Canadian “Democracy”**

The limitations of the bourgeois democracy in Canada is huge. People must ask – why has this 'democracy' in Canada not been able to solve important issues such as the right of Indigenous nations to self-determination, poverty, unemployment, racism, violence, sexism, homophobia and a host of other widespread serious social diseases. We need to ask ourselves: why, with all this fuss about Canadian democracy, does the system not serve the interest of Canadian people? In this author's opinion, the answer lies in the absence of true and popular institutions that could facilitate the participation of working and poor people in the democratic process. The example of the latest attempt to exclude Green Party Leader Elizabeth May from a federal debate by capitalist mass media supported by NDP, Conservative and Bloc Quebecois shows very clearly how this so-called democracy works.

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One good example of participatory democracy and mass participation in the process of elections is the example of the Cuban system of working class

organizations of various groups of people in Cuban society. Cuba's Electoral Law requires that they be made up of the following: municipal, provincial or national executives of the Central Cuban Workers' Organization (CTC), the Committees for the Defence of the

this form of electoral process. Cuban people participate actively in much higher numbers and percentages than in many countries, even advanced industrialized countries like the US and Canada. In the 2007 municipal elections in Cuba, 96.45% of eligible voters came out to the polls (National Electoral Commission, Cuba). Compare that to Canada, where a few party leaders squabble to keep each other out of the camera's (and the people's) eye, and no organized system to insure that the voices of society's most often marginalized are heard? Canada's eligible voter turnout was a shameful 64.7% in the 2006 general election (Source: Elections Canada).

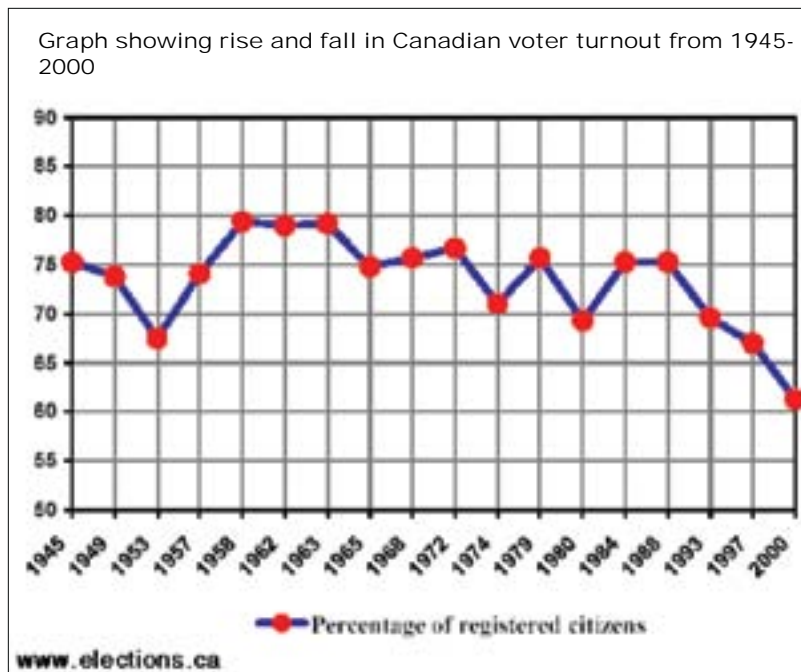
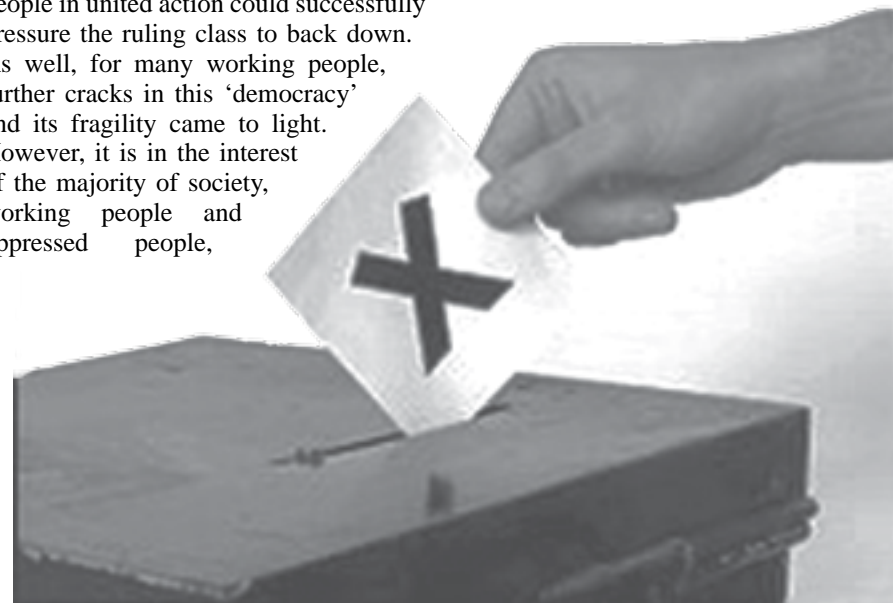
### Change is Needed

The recent fiasco of the temporary exclusion of Elizabeth May/Green Party exposed the open wound of Canadian democracy. It exposed also the anti-democratic nature of the ruling elites and their mass media as well as their electoral system. It also showed that the power of people in united action could successfully pressure the ruling class to back down.

As well, for many working people, further cracks in this 'democracy' and its fragility came to light. However, it is in the interest of the majority of society, working people and oppressed people,

that the basic democratic rights to "free speech" (which are constitutionally guaranteed by the bourgeois democratic law) be defended *and* expanded. There can be no 'we make 'em, we break 'em' policy by the ruling class, and they must be held accountable to the rules and laws that mostly have been made by them under pressure upon the struggle of working class and oppressed people.

Beyond that, we must go beyond the right of Elizabeth May, the leader of the Green Party, to be heard. We must go even further and demand the same free speech must be extended to all political parties, candidates and grassroots organizations representing the interests of poor and working people when it comes to deciding the next government. For this so-called Canadian democratic system to be real, there must be institutionalized and guaranteed participation at all levels for working, poor and oppressed people from all layers and groups. Anything else is a sham.



democracy.

### Cuba's Electoral System: Working Class Democracy in Action

First off, in Cuba candidates at the municipal level are nominated by people who know them and who suggest them based on their record and reputation in the community. The candidates are nominated at meetings of small areas called constituencies (which are smaller than municipalities). You can't nominate yourself to run for election in Cuba and candidates aren't chosen by small committees in political parties. If you are

Revolution (CDR), the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP), the University Students' Federation (FEU) and the Intermediate Level Students Federation (FEEM).

To give you an idea of how well these organizations represent Cuban people across the spectrum, consider the following:

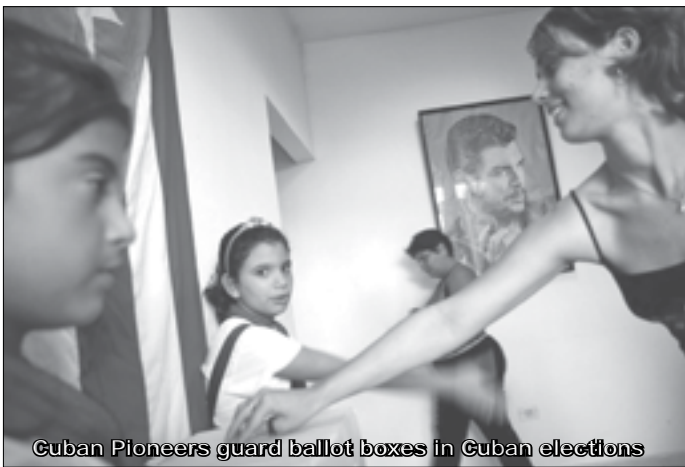
- 80% of Cubans over the age of 14 are members of the CDRs
- 98% of the working population belong to one of the 19 trade





## Vancouver

- (1) HIP HOP VS. WAR  
4th Annual Hip Hop Festival  
Against War & Occupation  
Sunrise Pavilion  
10341 135 St. Surrey  
near Surrey Skytrain Stn)  
5:30pm  
>>>>SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 20
- >>>SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 21  
Vancouver Art Gallery  
(750 Hornby St)  
1pm  
Org'd by: Mobilization Against War & Occupation (MAWO)  
www.mawovancouver.org
- (2) Protest against the coup attempts in Bolivia and Venezuela! Rally in support of the Bolivian and Venezuela revolutions"  
Rally & Protest  
>>>>SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 20  
American Consulate
- (1095 West Pender St)  
4pm  
Org'd by: Hands Off Venezuela  
www.handsoffvenezuela.org
- (3) "No War on Iran - International Day of Action" Rally & Protest  
>>>>SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 27  
Vancouver Art Gallery (750 Hornby St)  
2pm  
Organized by Mobilization Against War & Occupation (MAWO) & Iranian Community Against War (ICAW)  
www.mawovancouver.org  
http://icaw.blogspot.com
- (4) "A public forum on the world health situation and examples of community-based primary health care to achieve "Health for All."  
>>>>SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 28  
SFU Harbour Centre, Rm 1600



Cuban Pioneers guard ballot boxes in Cuban elections

nominated, you also can't run a campaign to promote yourself for election.

Only one of the people from the several constituencies in a municipality will be elected by their neighbours as their delegate to the Municipal Assembly. Then, these municipal representatives

receive suggestions from Nomination Commissions for who should be elected to the provincial assembly and as the deputy to the national assembly. Municipal councils vote on who will be the candidate from each municipality for the provincial assembly and also the national assembly based on these recommendations.

A cornerstone of this democratic process is who makes up these 'nomination commissions'. These commissions are with the participation of the mass

unions in Cuba (according to Guillermo Ferriol Molina, Director of Labour and Social Issues for the CTC)

- 80% of Cuban women over the age of 14 are members of the FMC (according to the FMC)

By ensuring that the mass-based popular organizations such as these form the nomination commissions, Cubans ensure that those whose voices are traditionally excluded from elections or political and social processes are in an active role and have a voice through these organizations that represent them.

As a result of these institutions and policies, Cuban people feel and are more represented through



Cuban candidate profiles posted at a polling station

## Toronto

- (515 West Hastings St)  
3pm  
Presented by the Alliance for People's Health  
www.vcn.bc.ca/~aph/  
>>>>FRIDAY OCTOBER 3
- (5) Iranian Cultural Night  
North Vancouver  
7pm  
Organized by Mobilization Against War & Occupation (MAWO) & Iranian Community Against War (ICAW)  
www.mawovancouver.org  
http://icaw.blogspot.com
- (6) Part of the International Month of Action to Demand "Free the Cuban 5!"  
Picket Action  
>>>>MONDAY OCTOBER 6  
US Consulate (1075 West Pender St)  
4pm  
Organized by Free the Cuban 5 Committee - Vancouver  
www.vancub5solidarity.com/  
freethethecuban.html
- (1) "Cuba Hurricane Relief Fundraiser"  
>>>>SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 21  
Lula Lounge  
(1585 Dundas St W.)  
7pm
- (2) "Cuba Hurricane Relief Fundraiser"  
>>>>FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 26  
Steelworkers' Hall (25 Cecil St.)  
7pm  
Organized by Cuba Hurricane Relief Committee
- (3) "From Hatuey to the Cuban Five"  
>>>>FRIDAY OCTOBER 10  
Steelworkers' Hall  
(25 Cecil St.)  
7pm  
Org'd by Toronto Forum on Cuba  
www.torontoforumoncuba.tyo.ca

## Niagara

- (1) "Conference in Canada on Democracy and Elections in Cuba"  
>>>>MONDAY SEPTEMBER 29  
Niagara Falls Public Library  
(4848 Victoria Ave)  
6:30pm  
Organized by the Canadian Cuban Friendship Assoc. - Niagara  
ccfanlagara@yahoo.ca
- (1) "Israeli Occupation on Trial"  
>>>>SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 27  
Sandy Hill Community Centre
- (2) "Remembering Sabra and Shatila - End Israeli Apartheid! Picket to support the international campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions!"  
>>>>FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 19  
Indigo Bookstore (corner of St. Catherine & McGill College)  
12:00pm  
Organized by Palestinian and Jewish Unity, Tadamoni Montreal, & Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights  
www.pajimontreal.org  
www.sphn.org

## Montreal

- (250 Somerset St. E.)  
7:30pm  
Org'd by: Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East  
www.cjpmc.ca

- (1) "Anti-Colonial Films - Under the Stars II!"  
>>>>THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 18  
In the lot beside l'insomnie (2035 St-Laurent - metro St-Laurent)  
7:30PM  
Presented by Barriere Lake Solidarity, & Tadamoni Montreal  
http://tadamon.resist.ca

# STRUGGLE CONTINUES: The 15<sup>th</sup> Protecting Mother Earth Gathering a Huge Success



15<sup>th</sup> Protecting Mother Earth Gathering 2008

*By Aaron Mercredi*

From July 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>, the Indigenous Environmental Network held its 15<sup>th</sup> 'Protecting Mother Earth' Conference. This year the theme was, 'Answering Mother Earth's Call for Healing—Reaffirming Our Roots.' Hosted by the Western Shoshone Defense Project, the conference and gathering took place on Western Shoshone territory in Newe Sogobe, in the Northern part of the state of Nevada. Over 300 delegates and participants, from Indigenous nations across North and South America, and groups from Europe took part in the discussions of energy and climate change, ecological destruction, protection of sacred sites, and the ongoing fight for Indigenous sovereignty.

The struggle against resource extraction industries in Indigenous communities was one of the main topics throughout the conference. Many participants drew on their experience coming from Indigenous communities impacted by this threat, and their campaigns against it. The case of the KI First Nation in Northern Ontario was presented. Six community leaders from KI were arrested and jailed simply for defending their people from a violation of their inherent rights to their land, as well as environmental devastation to their territory by Platinex, an exploration company. The

ongoing fight against the destructive and poisonous tar sands extraction in Northern Alberta was also presented. Since the tar sands project started, Dene, Cree, and Metis people who normally live off the land, are dealing with some of the rarest forms of cancer in their communities.

Throughout the US, it is the same story. The same companies that have created environmental havoc and devastated Indigenous communities with the tar sands, have proposed to build refineries for the oil extracted from those tar sands on Indigenous lands in North and South Dakota. While the conference was taking place, the Western Shoshone were still facing the threat of their land being further plundered by mining companies. For many years, the Western Shoshone Defense Project has been struggling against companies like Barrick and Newmont, who have been violating their treaty rights, desecrating sacred sites, and ruining their land. The conference opened up a space for people leading these struggles to share their experience.

The 15<sup>th</sup> 'Protecting Mother Earth' Conference was a great success in bringing people in struggle for Indigenous rights and environmental justice together. This meant sharing lessons they've learned, to find common struggles and unite to build a stronger international movement for Indigenous rights.



## *Who is the Iranian Community Against War?*



We are Iranians in Vancouver, Canada, who oppose war, occupation and sanctions by imperialist countries in this new era of war and occupation. Our goal is to educate, organize and mobilize the public, particularly the Iranian community outside of Iran, on the issues of war, occupation and sanctions. As well, we are currently campaigning against the ever increasing United States sanctions and military aggression against the people of Iran.

Contact us to find out about upcoming activities against war on Iran or to get involved!

<http://icaw.blogspot.com>  
[iraniansagainstwar@yahoo.ca](mailto:iraniansagainstwar@yahoo.ca)  
604-771-7290

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*Antonio*



Special Section

**ftt**

**FIRE THIS TIME**

# 5 Cuban Heroes Special Section

Pages 9-14



*Ramon*



*Gerardo*



*Reui*



*Germanda*





## *Who are these 5 Cuban Heroes Held in United States Prisons?*

By Tamara Hansen

### **“Who Are the Cuban 5 Held in US Jails?”**

Between 1994 and 1995, Cuba sent five unarmed men, Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González and René González on a mission to infiltrate and expose Miami-based terrorist groups, such as Alpha 66, Omega 7, Brothers to the Rescue and the Cuban American National Foundation. These groups and others are responsible for hundreds of terrorist attacks which, according to Radio Habana, have taken the lives of more than 3,400 people in Cuba since 1959.

The well-documented list of atrocities committed by these groups and others is long. It includes the bombing of hotels in Cuba, assassinations, spreading

and Spanish.

- Ramón Labañino studied and graduated with a degree in economics. He is also a very skilled athlete who participated in the All-Caribbean games.

- Fernando González graduated with a degree in international political relations. He was a student leader with the Federation of University Students (FEU) in Cuba during his studies. He also fought against the invading South African apartheid regime in Angola.

- René González was born in Chicago, his family returned to Cuba a couple of years after the victory of the Cuban revolution. He studied aviation and graduated as a pilot and flight instructor.

### **Their Trial**

The trial was basically over before it began, as it took place in Miami—a city with a heavy prejudice

## *≡ What is Their Current Situation? ≡*

**2006-Today: the more recent struggle for the Freedom of the 5!**

On August 20th 2006, a three-judge panel of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the charges and convictions against the Cuban 5 and they were granted a new trial outside of Miami. The three Appeals Court judges ruled that they were originally sentenced excessively, and that there was no evidence proving that the three men had ever obtained or transmitted any top-secret information. This was a huge victory for the 5 Cuban Heroes and justice seeking people around the world. However, exactly one year later in August 2007, after immense pressure from US Attorney General Roberto González, the full twelve judge panel of the same court reversed the favourable decision of the three judges. This meant the case would continue in Miami where there is no possibility of a fair trial.

So the lawyers of the 5 Cuban Heroes went back to court to argue against some of the most important manufactured charges

against the 5. This includes the charge of “conspiracy to commit murder” laid against Gerardo Hernández. On June 4th 2008, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta released another decision to uphold the unjust convictions against the 5 anti-terrorist Cuban Heroes. The verdict of “guilty” was upheld on all counts, from the minor charges to the outrageous charge of “conspiracy to commit murder”.

Cuba made a request to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta to reconsider the decision of June 4th 2008. On September 2nd 2008, the unfavourable June 4th decision was upheld by the appeals court. This means, Gerardo Hernández is still faced with 2 life sentences plus 15 years and René González for 15 years. However, they did order that three of the Cuban 5 be re-sentenced. Antonio (life plus 10 years), Ramón (life plus 18 years), and Fernando (19 years), though they are being re-sentenced by the same judge in Miami that condemned them originally.

September 12th 2008 marked the 10th year of unjust imprisonment for the 5 Cuban Heroes. The US government is using these 5 men as

part of their longstanding and brutal campaign to undermine the human rights of the Cuban people. This campaign includes the US criminal and immoral blockade on Cuba as well as the US-sponsored terrorism against Cuba.

The US government is paving the way for continued Miami-based terrorism and attacks against the Cuban people. As long as the Cuban 5 are in prison, the truth they uncovered will remain behind bars and the anti-Cuba Miami Mafia is free to operate and continue to attack Cuba with impunity. The US government must end this aggression, jail the anti-Cuba terrorists operating within US borders and free these 5 men.

In this extreme travesty of justice, the time to act is now. Justice and freedom for the Cuban 5 will only come through work on the streets. The US government needs to know that people all over the world and in the United States know about the case of the 5 and demands justice. As human and peace-loving people it is our job to join the call and demand freedom for the 5 Heroes.



of diseases, sabotage, and attacks against Cuba's supporters in the US. An important example of these attacks was the bombing of the Lincoln Center in 1978 after a Cuban ballet performance. Another, and one of the most horrendous attacks, was the bombing of a Cuban airliner in 1976, which took the lives of 73 people. The 5 Cuban Heroes were gathering evidence to expose the terrorists responsible for these crimes against Cuba and humanity.

Cuba released all the information that the 5 collected to the FBI. However, on September 12th 1998, the FBI arrested the Cuban 5 and threw them in solitary confinement for 17 months. It was not until 2001 that these men were given a trial.

#### Who are these men?

These men were five very accomplished and highly regarded in Cuba. According to the website of the National Committee to Free the Cuban 5 (US):

- Gerardo Hernández studied international political relations. He fought as part of the Cuban forces in Angola against South African apartheid. Gerardo is a cartoonist and humourist, who has had many of his drawings published, including in his own book, "You Can Achieve Everything with Love and Humor".

- Antonio Guerrero was born in Miami. His parents returned to Cuba shortly after the triumph of the Cuban revolution. Antonio studied airfield construction engineering in Kiev, Ukraine. He is also a great poet and has had his works published in both English

against anything relating to Cuba. During their trial the US government claimed the 5 were engaged in espionage or spying against US military bases and threatening "national security". Since the US could not prove this directly they charged the 5 with "conspiracy to commit espionage". The most sinister case is that of Gerardo who they charged with "conspiracy to commit murder".

Throughout their trial the US government's lack of evidence was clear, as was their political motivation for arresting and charging these five Cubans. After a seven-month show trial (one of the longest in US history), the Cuban 5 were sentenced to between 15 years and two life sentences. When the Cuban 5 were first sentenced, few outside of Miami knew about the proceedings. However, these grossly unjust sentences did not go unnoticed and immediately following the trial, organizations within Cuba, the US, and around the world responded to the call to fight for the freedom of these 5 men. We call these men heroes because they defended Cuba and humanity from terrorism. Since then, solidarity work has continued to grow and expand, as workers, students and social justice activists have all joined the struggle for their freedom.

*Antonio*

*René*

*Ramón*

*Fernando*

*Gerardo*

## A Message from René González

June 10, 2008

Dear Friend:

After almost 10 years of unjust imprisonment, justice seems more removed. The ruling of the court of appeals—so plagued with omissions and falsifications that at times it seems to be about another process—demonstrates once more that one cannot expect even the appearance of this judicial system applying its own laws.

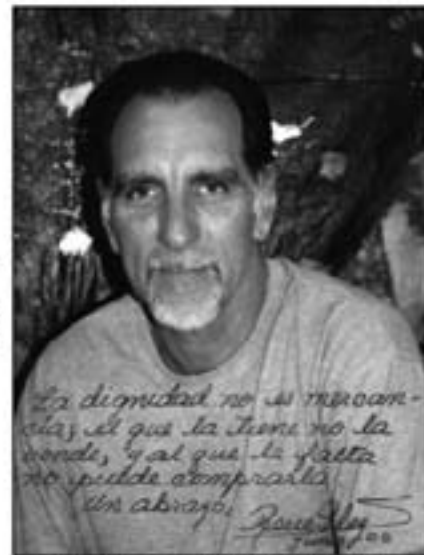
We have always counted on you for the morale that sustains us, on the support of our people and the affection of people like you, which has been bestowed upon us for all these years, attention that we have not even been able to reciprocate with in proper measure. These words do not aspire to do so, they are only an attempt to tell you: Thank you very much.

It has been a privilege to count on you all this time, multiplied in thousands of letters, books, cards, prayers, good wishes, subscriptions or personal photographs. In these moments, in which we arise above the injustice and our commitment is much stronger, I rightfully think of you at this time and thank you.

If in the past we did something to deserve this gift of solidarity and affection, rest assured that we will never stop struggling, and hopefully continue to merit that gift.

An embrace,

*René González Schwercst*

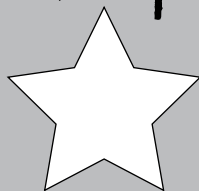


*"Dignity is not a commodity; who has it does not sell it, and who lacks it cannot buy it."*

*An embrace, René González, June 2008*

From the National Committee to Free the Cuban 5 website:  
<http://www.freethefive.org>

# Vancouver Organizing Featured in Two Articles by Cuban Media Following 10th Anniversary of the Imprisonment of the 5 Cuban Heroes!



**acn** CUBAN NEWS AGENCY

*Solidarity with the Cuban Five in Canada, the Dominican Republic and New Zealand*

<http://www.cubanews.acn.cu>

HAVANA, Cuba, Sept 11 (acn) The Canadian Committee for the Release of the Cuban Five and Vancouver Cuba Solidarity Communities (VCSC) have called a rally for Friday in that Canadian city, in support of the cause of these patriots.

The meeting will be held in front of the US Consulate in Vancouver, where participants will demand the release of these five Cuban antiterrorist fighters, from their prisons in the United States, reports Juventud Rebelde newspaper.

Demonstrators will also demand the end of Washington's economic and financial blockade against the island and will condemn the support given by the US government to Miami-based anti-Cuba terrorist groups

The communiqué says that "while the Five are behind bars for revealing the truth, the anti-Cuban mafia in Miami is free to continue launching its attacks against Cuba with absolute impunity", adding that the US government must end that aggression, and lock up anti-Cuban terrorists like Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch-, and free the Five".

5 NOW!

JUVENTUD  
**rebelde**.CU

*Exigirán en Vancouver la libertad de los Cinco cubanos antiterroristas*

<http://www.juventudrebelde.cu>

El Comité por la liberación de los Cinco de Vancouver convocó a un mitin el próximo viernes 12 frente al consulado de Estados Unidos en el centro de esta ciudad canadiense

VANCOUVER, septiembre 10.— El Comité por la liberación de los Cinco de Vancouver y Comunidades de Vancouver en Solidaridad con Cuba (VCSC) convocaron a un mitin el próximo viernes 12 de septiembre frente al Consulado de Estados Unidos en el centro de esta ciudad

y René (15 años), y revisar las de Ramón, Antonio y Fernando en la Corte de Miami —donde fueron originalmente juzgados, en medio de un ambiente hostil contra Cuba, exacerbado por la prensa local— «muestra claramente que el gobierno de EE.UU. y su sistema legal no le darán a los Cinco un juicio justo e imparcial».

La jornada incluye también una noche especial de cultura dedicada a los Cinco, en la que se leerá poesía escrita a los héroes cubanos por defensores de Vancouver.

También la Comisión de



Meanwhile, Agapito Alcántara, secretary for organization of the Human Rights Commission, affirmed that the Dominican Republic is committed to the international struggle for the release of the Cuban Five, incarcerated in the United States.

For its part, the Cuba solidarity movement in New Zealand, on Wednesday, created a national committee in defense of the Five, the membership of which will be made public on September 12, during a rally in front of the US embassy in Wellington, New Zealand's capital. They will demand the release of these Cuban heroes, on the day that marks the 10th anniversary of their unjust imprisonment, reports Prensa Latina news agency.

Gerardo Hernández, Fernando González, Ramón Labañino, René González and Antonio Guerrero were arrested on September 12, 1998, and subjected to a biased trial, where they were given harsh unjust sentences for having infiltrated anti-Cuban organizations based in Florida.



# Free the Cuban

canadiense, para exigir la inmediata excarcelación de los antiterroristas cubanos presos en Estados Unidos.

La convocatoria explica que Washington usa a Ramón, René, Gerardo, Antonio y Fernando como parte de su brutal campaña para socavar los derechos humanos del pueblo cubano, poniendo en estos momentos más presión que nunca. Esta política incluye el bloqueo económico y financiero y el apoyo a grupos terroristas anticubanos radicados en Miami, culpables de muchos crímenes contra la Isla.

«Mientras que los Cinco Héroes permanecen detrás de las rejas por revelar la verdad, la mafia anticubana de Miami está libre para continuar operando sus ataques contra Cuba con total impunidad. El gobierno de EE.UU. debe terminar con esta agresión, encerrar a los terroristas anticubanos —como Posada Carriles y Orlando Bosch—, y liberar a los Cinco», dijo el comunicado de las organizaciones que también abogan por el cese del bloqueo.

Las organizaciones convocantes recuerdan que la última decisión de la Corte de Apelaciones de Atlanta, el 2 de septiembre, al denegar nuevamente las solicitudes de reconsideración del caso, y mantener las sentencias de Gerardo (dos cadenas perpetuas más 15 años)

Derechos Humanos de República Dominicana está comprometida con la lucha mundial por los Cinco, según manifestó a PL, Agapito Alcántara, secretario de organización del ente.

Lo impactante del pueblo cubano es su alto concepto de la solidaridad, que se manifiesta en su voluntad de lograr el retorno de esos hombres que los protegían de ataques terroristas, dijo Alcántara, quien integró un grupo de profesionales, líderes sindicales, y activistas sociales, que organizaron por iniciativa propia una visita a la Isla.

Por su parte, el movimiento de solidaridad con Cuba en Nueva Zelanda estableció este miércoles un comité nacional en defensa de los Cinco, cuya composición se dará a conocer el 12 de septiembre en una protesta frente a la embajada de EE.UU. en la capital neozelandesa, Wellington, para exigir la libertad de los antiterroristas cubanos cuando se cumplen diez años de su injusto encarcelamiento, informó PL.

El comité está integrado por abogados, académicos, políticos, sindicalistas, y estará presidido por el secretario de la Sociedad de Amistad con Cuba de la ciudad de Christchurch, indicó el despacho.

# "We Want to See Our Husbands!"

International Campaign for the visitation rights of wives of the Cuban 5!

## Introduction By Tamara Hansen

An important International campaign is in full swing for the visitation rights of Adriana Pérez (wife of Gerardo Hernández) and Olga Salanueva (wife of René González). Postcards have been printed and mailed to solidarity groups around the world to increase the knowledge about the Case of the Cuban 5 and also about the rights of their families to visit them while they are being held in the US jails. Please read the appeal statement below sent by the International Committee to Free the Cuban 5 and get involved in this most important campaign.

For your wish to receive copies of the postcard please contact:

1- If you are in Vancouver or British Columbia: cuban5\_van@yahoo.com

2- If you are living outside of BC: info@thecuban5.org

## **"We Want to See Our Husbands!"**

The article below is taken from:

<http://www.thecuban5.org>

On 8 separate occasions, including this last September, the U.S. government has denied entry visas to Adriana Perez and Olga Salanueva to visit their imprisoned husbands.

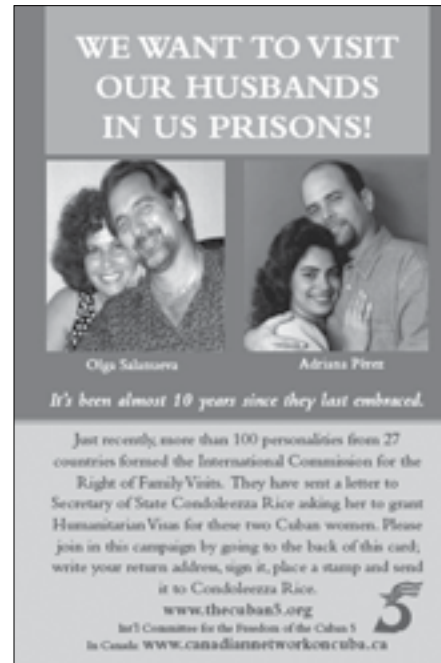
It has been almost 10 years since they last embraced.

Their husbands, Gerardo Hernández and René González, are two of the Cuban Five, as they are internationally known, who infiltrated anti-Cuban right wing exile groups in order to prevent further terrorist attacks against Cuba organized by extremists in Miami.

In a travesty of justice, the U.S. government arrested the very people working to prevent terrorist acts. Meanwhile, that same government allows known dangerous terrorists Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch to roam free in Miami.

We appeal to your sense of compassion and fairness and ask you to join Amnesty International, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, members of the European Parliament, 13 California Mayors, and many others in respectfully calling on U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to grant, on humanitarian grounds, temporary visitation visas to these two Cuban women, so that they may visit their husbands, currently incarcerated in U.S. prisons.

*libertad!*



By Alison Bodine

## *See You in Cuba*

*See you in Cuba  
5 heroes returned*

*10 years, 1 decade  
Denied embrace, or kiss  
Weddings and funerals  
Celebration, triumph*

*Still given to so many  
Hope for justice  
Undeniable strength and determination  
A promise of return*

*By circumstance I counted tens of  
thousands of signatures  
Demanding your freedom  
From 78 Countries  
Mothers, sisters, fathers, brothers,  
humans  
Different colors of paper, different sizes  
Decorated with personal notes  
Or filled with governmental  
identification numbers*

*The White House may never accept  
Their true legitimacy  
But we will  
Because you said that even if there was  
one person  
Fighting for your freedom from the  
outside  
You would fight from within*

*Pounding pavement  
In front of US Federal Courts  
Or other symbols of US Imperialism  
Demanding in so many languages  
Justice  
Freedom  
For our 5 brothers  
We wage this battle together*

*See you in Cuba  
5 heroes returned*





Vancouver



Montréal

# Groups Across Canada Mark the **10 Years** of Unjust Imprisonment of the Cuban 5!



Vancouver



Montréal

## Reports Edited and Compiled By Tamara Hansen

On Friday September 12<sup>th</sup> 2008, Cuba solidarity groups across Canada joined the call to raise awareness about the fact that the Cuban 5 have now been in held unjustly in US prisons for 10 years! Throughout the world supporters of the Cuban Five organized over 40 actions in defense of the Five and demanded their immediate release from US prisons. Below are short reports from the events held in Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver.

### **VANCOUVER:**

Excerpts below are from full reports at:

<http://vancubasolidarity.com/freethefivevan.html>

"10 years too long!" rang through the streets of Vancouver on September 12, 2008, the Free the Cuban Five Committee-Vancouver and Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba co-organized the picket which saw over 25 people picket the US Consulate.

MC Noah Fine, the coordinator of the Free the Cuban Five Committee-Vancouver, welcomed everyone to the picket. The first round of protesting began with people chanting for justice for the Five. The first speaker, phoning from Washington, DC, was Alison Bodine. She spoke about the actions in Washington that saw the US government arrest five Cuban 5 supporters for trying to deliver over 100,000 petitions in support of the Cuban Five to George Bush.

The other two dynamic speakers were Charles Boylan, a member of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) and Nita Palmer, an organizer with the Free the Cuban 5 Committee-Vancouver and the Pastors for Peace Caravan to Cuba. Both spoke of the urgency of the case of the Cuban 5 today and why people need to fight for their freedom.

The picket was followed by an extremely important and poignant cultural evening. In a bold quest the FC5C-Van had sent a broad call for original poetry to commemorate 10 years of our continued fight for justice. The response was extraordinary with over 30 people writing heart-felt poems for the 5 heroes and this special cultural night. Over 45 supporters and defenders of the Cuban 5 enjoyed a great evening of original poetry for the 5 heroes, at Mount Pleasant Neighborhood House in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

Poetry was not only read in English, but also in Spanish, French and Farsi. Added to this were poems sung as songs, poems read over powerful music and hip hop infused spoken word. Many poems had a common introduction... "I am not really a poet," or "I have never really written poetry," followed by how all had been inspired to write their poem for the 5. From humble introductions came moving and imaginative poems that encompassed many aspects of the case of the 5 Heroes, rousing emotions of sorrow, happiness, anger and above all the determination to continue the fight for their freedom.

The beautiful film, "Ivette" about the daughter of René González (one of the Cuban 5) was also shown. The film illustrates the injustice inflicted on 7-year-old Ivette, as she dedicates a drawing

to a father she hadn't seen since she was 2.

The Free the Cuban Five Committee – Vancouver & Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba would like send another great big "Thank You" to everyone who contributed their poems!

### **TORONTO:**

Excerpts from the full report at:

<http://www.freethefive.org>

This September 12th, Toronto participated in the international condemnation of ten years of the unjust imprisonment of the Cuban Five, with an event organized by Toronto Forum on Cuba and presented by Ontario Public Interest Research Group at U of T, demanding freedom for the Cuban Five and visitation rights for their families.

Thando Hyman, the host of the "African Woman and Family" program on 89.5 CIUT-FM, was the master of ceremonies for the evening and after welcoming everyone, she invited Morteza Gorgzadeh to give a brief introduction of Toronto Forum on Cuba.

The Honourable Consul General of Cuba in Toronto, Laureano Cardoso, described the injustice that the Cuban Five and their families continue to be subjected to and he provided some of the circumstances surrounding their arrest and their conviction. Samira Amndan, the Honourable Consul and the Consul General of the Consulate of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in Toronto brought strong words of solidarity for the Cuban Five.

Other wonderful and enthusiastic speakers included: William Castilla Alvarez, a Social

Researcher and Human Rights Defender in Colombia; Sister Marie Clark Walker, Executive Vice President of the Canadian Labour Congress; Keith Ellis, Professor Emeritus and former Chair of the Latin American Studies Committee of the University of Toronto; Juan Carranza, Attorney at Law; and Mr. Khaled Muammar, the President of the Canadian Arab Federation

A letter of solidarity was also read from Dave Bleakney from the Education Department of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, who was scheduled to speak.

Poetry written by two of the Cuban Five –Antonio Guerrero and Ramón Labañino– was interpreted by Carlos Angulo from Perú and by Ardis Harriman from CCFA-Toronto. Benny Esguerra thrilled the audience with his performance of a song entitled "Se Acabe el Silencio" (Break the Silence), dedicated to the Five and by singing and rapping more lyrics filled with socially conscious context. Ten-year old Skigh Johnson concluded the cultural segment of the program, by performing a monologue written by her, portraying Ivette, René González' daughter.

The event had a successful participation of about 90 people united in demanding freedom for the Cuban Five, over \$1000 in donations were collected for the Cuba Hurricane Relief and hundreds for the Cuban Five campaign.

### **QUÉBEC:**

Excerpts from a Press release of the Table de Concertation Solidarité Québec-Cuba and its

*Continued on page 13*



# FREE THE FIVE CUBAN HEROES



**GERARDO  
hernández**

2 Life Sentence  
+  
15 years in prison



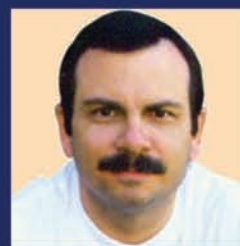
**RAMÓN  
labañino**

1 Life Sentence  
+  
18 years in prison



**ANTONIO  
guerrero**

1 Life Sentence  
+  
10 years in prison



**FERNANDO  
gonzález**

19 years in prison



**RENÉ  
gonzález**

15 years in prison

Original Design: Tamara Velázquez López / Photographer: Karoly Valerio Emerson  
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[www.firethistime.net](http://www.firethistime.net)



# 56 MPS SIGN LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR THE CUBAN FIVE

## Canadian Network on Cuba & La Table de Concertation de Solidarité Québec-Cuba, Joint Statement

July 7 2008

Canadian Network on Cuba & La Table de Concertation de Solidarité Québec-Cuba, Joint Statement

On the initiative of Francine Lalonde, Bloc Québécois MP for La Pointe-de-l'île and Foreign Affairs critic, 56 Members of Parliament signed a letter demanding justice for the Five Cubans imprisoned in the United States and for their families. In a good collaborative gesture with the Bloc Québécois, Libby Davies, MP for Vancouver East, organized the letter signing within the New Democratic Party.

The letter explaining the case of the Five was signed by 40 Bloc Québécois and 16 New Democratic Party MPs. During the week of June 23-27, 2008 the letter was forwarded to the Honourable David Emerson, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada with copy to Mr. Michael Mukasey, Attorney General of the United States, and Mr. David Wilkins, Ambassador of the United States to Canada.

The letter indicates that Fernando González Llort, René González Schwerert, Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez, Gerardo Hernández Nordelo and Ramón Labañino Salazar, known internationally as the "Five" and imprisoned in the

United States for more than 9 years, have undergone an unfair trial and conditions of detention which contravene the Constitution of the United States and international law. The letter signed by 56 MPs



hinges, inter alia, on Amnesty International, on the United Nations Working Group on arbitrary detentions, which stems from the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, and also on a group of 110 British members of Parliament

who denounced the conditions of the trial and the imprisonment. The letter also mentions that these five people are held in five separate maximum security prisons and are kept for long periods in isolation cells; two of them have been denied their right to family visits. It also states that, since the Atlanta Court of Appeal declared that the verdicts against the Cuban Five were invalid, nothing justifies their imprisonment any longer or the arbitrary situation that is extremely painful for the Cuban Five and their families.

In 1998 the Cuban government had given to the American authorities a thick report which showed that terrorist acts were being plotted on American soil by anti-Cuba groups living primarily in Miami. The information was gathered largely from data collected by the Cuban Five who had infiltrated these groups; but rather than acting on this information, it was the Cuban Five who were arrested on September 12, 1998.

Other members of Parliament in the world have denounced the injustice made against the Five and their families, such as Karel De Gucht, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who made a statement last June 30th.

In Québec, in addition to many

ordinary citizens, well-known personalities such as Claudette Carboneau, president of the CSN, Elsie Lefebvre, Bloc Québécois Party former MP as well as 93 personalities gave their support to the Five. In Canada, Ms. Libby Davies, NDP MP for Vancouver East, gathered signatures of other MPs from her party. The support of the NDP MPs for the Five is added to that of the Labour Congress of Canada and the Canadian Federation of Students, among others.

In October 2007 Ms. Francine Lalonde met in her office of Pointe-aux-Trembles, with Ms. Elizabeth Palmeiro, wife of Ramón Labañino, one of the Five.

The Canadian Network on Cuba and the Table de concertation de solidarité Québec-Cuba support fully the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party in this joint call for justice and add our voices to those of our MPs. We will continue in our joint efforts to bring justice for the Five by making their case known to the public of Québec and Canada and also in collaboration with other justice seeking organizations in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

We demand justice for the Five and their families!

Groups Across Canada Mark the 10 Years of Unjust Imprisonment of the Cuban 5!

*Continued from page 11*

Comité Fabio Di Celmo pour les 5.

On 12 September, there will be exactly 10 years since the Cuban Five are unjustly imprisoned in the USA. In Montreal at the invitation of the Table de Concertation Solidarité Québec-Cuba and its Comité Fabio Di Celmo pour les 5, more than 60 people came forward to the U.S. consulate to demand the freedom of 5 Cubans imprisoned in the U.S. 350 informative leaflets were distributed to pedestrians and passing cars while demonstrators chanted slogans in support of 5 and their families. The participation of 5 people shackled and dressed as prisoners and musicians added to the animation of the event.

Earlier in the day, representatives of the committee handed over a petition to the U.S. consulate signed by 2,020 Quebecers addressed to the Ambassador of the United States to Canada, David Wilkins. The signatories support the demand: 'Mr Ambassador of USA to Canada, David Wilkins: We demand the release of five Cubans Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez, Ramón Labañino Salazar, Fernando González Llort, René González Schwerert who are unjustly imprisoned in the USA for defending the Cuban people against terrorist attacks.

We continue to hold picket lines once a month before the U.S. consulate in Montreal since May 2007. The event was covered by national and local media.

Press Release:  
500,000-Strong  
Student Movement  
in Canada Demands:



**FIRE THE CUBAN 5  
NOW!**

By Noah Fine

June 12 2008

Special to freethefive.org

During the May 2008 Semi-Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) the following motion was passed:

“Be it further resolved that a letter be written to U.S. President George W. Bush, Condoleezza Rice, Barack Obama, Hilary Clinton, and John McCain demanding immediate freedom for the ‘Cuban 5’.

The Cuban Five are five Cuban men who were sent to Miami to investigate terrorist groups which have committed countless acts of terror against Cuba, including the mid-air bombing of a Cuban airliner which killed all 73 people on board. The Five gave the information they had collected over to the U.S. government who then, instead of charging and jailing the terrorists, jailed the Cuban Five anti-terrorist Heroes. The U.S. government has since charged and convicted these Five brave men with “conspiracy to commit espionage” and “conspiracy to commit murder”.

The Five will have been in prison for ten years this September. For more information on the case of the Five Cuban Heroes please visit: [www.vancubasolidarity.com/freethefivevan.html](http://www.vancubasolidarity.com/freethefivevan.html), [www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca](http://www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca), and [www.freethefive.org](http://www.freethefive.org)

The Canadian Federation of Students represents over half a million students in Canada and has a membership of over 80 college and university students’ unions.

In this time when the criminal U.S. government is trying to close the case of the Five in their favour and hold them indefinitely in prison, it becomes so much more important to spread the word and cry of injustice in the case of our Five brothers.

This is a great step forward for the movement to free the Five as the weight of half a million students in Canada is added to the international movement to free the Five.

The letter written to the U.S. Government on behalf of the Canadian Federation of Students appears on this page.

Free the Cuban Five Now!

June 9, 2008

President George W. Bush  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500



Dear President,

The Canadian Federation of Students is Canada’s national students’ organization representing more than one half million students across Canada. At our May semi-annual general meeting, students’ unions passed a resolution calling on the Government of the United States for their immediate release from prison.

The Cuban Five are five Cuban men currently serving four life sentences in a U.S. prison after being unjustly convicted in a U.S. federal court in Miami, on June 8, 2001, a decision that was upheld by the 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta, Georgia on June 4, 2008. It is our understanding that these five men, Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González and René González, were falsely accused by the U.S. government of committing espionage against the United States, and other related charges. Upon their arrest the “Cuban 5” were kept in solitary confinement for 17 months without access to legal representation or information about the charges to be laid against them.

On May 27, 2005, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled that the detention of the five Cuban political prisoners is arbitrary and in violation of international law. The UN ruling also found that the Cubans were denied access to the totality of the evidence against them and that their lawyers were also denied access to the information needed to defend their clients adequately. In addition, Adriana Pérez and Olga Salanueva, wives of prisoners Gerardo Hernández and René González, have been denied entry into the United States to visit them in jail, violating their human rights, international conventions and treaties, and the U.S. Constitution. In a report released on May 28, 2008, Amnesty International also denounced the delay in the appeal process, the lack of evidence against the Cuban 5 and the prosecution’s improper conduct.

The ruling of the United Nations and Amnesty International confirms that the case of the Cuban 5 is a highly political trial that was thoroughly unfair and unjust. As such, we urge you to act immediately to allow visitation rights to the family of the Cuban Five and to release them from jail without delay.

Sincerely,

Katherine Giroux-Bougard  
National Chairperson

c.c. Secretary Condoleezza Rice, Department of State

c.c. Senator Hillary Clinton, New York

c.c. Senator Barack Obama, Illinois

c.c. Senator John McCain, Arizona



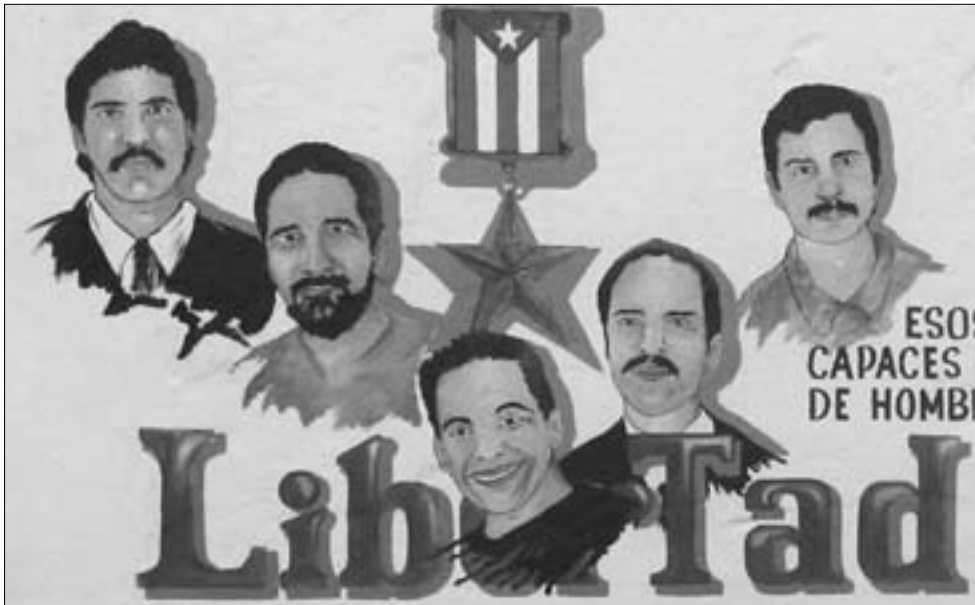


*By Alison Bodine*

September 12th 2008 marks 10 years since the imprisonment of the Cuban 5. Like any period since that day, this summer has been a period of both continued injustice for the 5 heroes and increased struggle for their freedom. In the United States, peace and justice loving people are coming together, now more than ever, to demand "Free the Cuban 5 Anti-Terrorist Heroes!" "Justice for Ramón Labañino, René González, Antonio Guerrero, Gerardo Hernández and Fernando González!"

#### **US Ruling Class Pulls the Rope Tighter**

Since the June 4th 2008 ruling of the 11th



## **Anywhere and Everywhere**

# *The Case of the 5 Cuban Heroes Gaining More Support in the US*

Circuit Court of Appeals there has been increased action in solidarity with the Cuban 5. People all over the world have vowed not to step down until the 5 are free. People in the United States demonstrated creativity and determination with a variety of actions.

In the two days following the release of the June 4th decision about the case of the Cuban 5, there were immediate responses all over the world. People took to the streets in all major US cities and some smaller ones to demand freedom for the 5, in response to yet another "guilty" verdict handed down in the US courts. This included an action in Miami, the city where three of the Cuban 5 are now facing re-sentencing and the most fiercely anti-Cuban city in the world. There was also an important press conference scheduled in order to continue to try and break the media

their case through the work of the Caravan.

When the Caravan made its way back along the west coast, returning with people from the trip to Cuba, there was yet another show of growing solidarity with the Cuban 5 waiting in San Francisco, CA - a gigantic billboard displayed on a busy street for the entire month of August. The billboard measured 35 by 75 feet, with pictures of the Cuban 5 and "10 years in US prisons: persecuted for stopping terrorism: Free the Cuban 5!" written in large yellow letters. The unveiling of the billboard got support from Cindy Sheehan, an important US antiwar activist who is also running for US Congress in San Francisco. Tim Paulson, Executive Director of the San Francisco Labour Council, was also present.

initiated by the Popular Education Project to Free the Cuban 5, and now has dozens of endorsers all over the US and Canada, from Latin American solidarity organizations to community groups and individuals. Below are reports from some of the actions during this time. Also keep in mind that there are still many more to come.

#### **Action and Action and More Action**

On September 12th there was a press conference at the White House called for by the National Committee to Free the Cuban 5. The conference marked the collection and attempted delivery of 102,000 signatures on petitions from 78 countries demanding freedom for the Cuban 5. In an act of civil disobedience during the attempted delivery



special guest of the afternoon. The head of the Cuban Interests Section in Washington DC, Jorge Bolaños, gave an inspiring speech to a room full of solidarity activists. He outlined the importance of solidarity work with the Cuban 5 and continuing the struggle to defend Cuba. As everyone left the event to return to their homes, near or far away, it was apparent that everyone was inspired by the events of the day and would carry this new energy back to their organizing.

In the evening on September 13th there was also an important concert organized in New York City for the Cuban 5. Many famous Puerto Rican and other Latin American musicians, as well as artists, participated in the concert, entitled "Five

Stars and One Song," after the Cuban 5. It also brought out many people from New York City, especially from the large Dominican and Puerto Rican communities. Performing at the concert were the Puerto Rican Golden Jazz All Stars, the Dominican songwriter Victor Victor and his group, and Puerto Rican legend Danny Rivera. There was a message of solidarity from Danny Glover read during the celebration of hope and struggle. The concert, organized by the International Committee to Free the Cuban 5, also had a special focus on the campaign to pressure the United States government to grant visas for Olga Salanueva and Adriana Perez, who have been unable to visit their husbands in US jails for over 9 years.

silence on the case of the Cuban 5. Activists handed out hundreds of leaflets in the city of San Francisco alone, where they had gathered for a public rally on a busy street. These “Day After” actions were the result of a call by the National Committee to Free the Cuban 5 (US) to assure united actions the day after the decision was handed down. Due to this effort the June 5th and 6th actions were organized quickly and successfully.

### Resistance and Fight Back

Following the international protest organized by the National Committee to Free the Cuban 5, the Pastors for Peace Caravan to Cuba took to the road, as it does every year. Pastors for Peace is an organization which, for the past 16 years, has been defying the US blockade by taking people and aid from across the US to Cuba. A component of this effort to break the immoral and inhuman blockade against Cuba is a Caravan throughout the US and Canada, where people travel on brightly painted school buses and hold meetings in cities along the route. This year each of the 5 buses that went on different paths through the US were dedicated to one of the Cuban 5. In this way people driving on the road could learn about the case of the 5 case by seeing a bus, and also learn about how to get involved. At every one of the 120 stops that the Caravan made on its way to Cuba, a major element of the program was the case of the 5. Each year thousands of young people, students, workers, and elders find out about

Through this billboard, thousands of people in San Francisco could learn about the case of the Cuban 5 and how to get involved. The fundraising effort for the billboard also drew lots of support, including donations from Cuban 5 committees all over the world. The billboard campaign was also organized by the National Committee to Free the Cuban 5.

At the Democratic and Republican National Conventions in late August and early September 2008, the case of the Cuban 5 was yet again brought to the streets. In Denver, at the Democratic National Convention, there was a political prisoners rally that went from a large park in Denver, along the busy downtown pedestrian mall to the Federal Courthouse. The Cuban 5 were a large component of this march, with people holding signs and handing out leaflets about their case along the entire route. Their case had a presence alongside other political prisoners in the United States, including Leonard Peltier and Mumia Abu Jamal. Cuban 5 activists also participated in the mass antiwar march on the Republican National Convention.

Most recently, there was a series of events organized in many cities of the US to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the arrest and imprisonment of the Cuban 5. All of these actions are organized within an entire month of activities called in solidarity with the Cuban 5. This month was

of the signatures to George W. Bush, 5 people were arrested, each one representing one of the Cuban 5. This press conference brought out many different media outlets including Al Jazeera English, Univision and CNN. This event also announced the delivery of a letter signed by many important supporters of the Cuban 5 and their wives. Addressed to Bush, the letter was signed by Howard Zinn, Alice Walker, Noam Chomsky, Martin Sheen and Ramsey Clark (former US Attorney General), among others.

On September 13<sup>th</sup> there was a march on Washington organized by a coalition of Cuban 5 committees and solidarity groups. This brought people from different parts of the US to Washington DC in order to march in front of the White House in defense of the Cuban 5. It began with a rally at Malcolm X Park, which included messages of solidarity from many local and visiting groups. This was followed by a loud and energetic march through many busy streets and different neighborhoods in Washington DC with constant chants of “Free, Free, Free the Cuban 5!” People then gathered for an indoor rally at the local SEIU union hall. Leonard Weinglass, a lawyer for the Cuban 5, gave an important update about the case of the Cuban 5, making clear the necessity of support and solidarity at this moment. Other speakers followed Leonard leading up to the

### This Long Struggle Will Continue

Since the June 4th decision against the Cuban 5, it is apparent that solidarity is growing across the United States. From rallies and pickets, to press conferences and concerts, thousands and thousands of people in the US who did not know about the case of these 5 anti-terrorist fighters now do. It is only with this continued energy and coordinated action that justice loving people in the US can raise the campaign for the freedom the Cuban 5 to the level needed to guarantee their freedom. In the next few months, time is especially vital. Three of the Cuban 5 will be re-sentenced in Miami, while the other 2 and the entire case of these 5 Cuban heroes goes in front of the Supreme Court of the US. Now is the time more than ever to get involved.



New York City



New York City



San Francisco, California



San Antonio, Texas



Washington, DC



## INTERVIEW WITH SAM MCKAY

*continued from page 4*

**LC:** At the UN, Canada was getting beaten up, not only from the KI issue but other Canadian groups there. The Minister of Indian affairs went over there and actually had a press release to try and salvage Canada's image as a champion of human rights. What they were saying is Canada is not a champion of human rights, because I flashed pictures of him in handcuffs and my nephew in handcuffs. They mean that this is proof of violation of human rights in Canada. So, what happens there is Canada and the province can no longer do whatever they want because there's going to be a backlash from the First Nations communities and also from the people who support human rights and environmental rights. It's not that easy anymore. Although they'll try, they will be dealing with not only with First Nations but also other supporters.

**FTT:** Now that you're out of prison, what's next?

**SM:** Well, I could give you a copy of my statement. Not my statement, but the KI statement.

**LC:** What you should know about the KI-6 is that there was another member of the council that had been charged but was going to fight that charge separately, but his case never got to court. They were released. They didn't have a case.

sovereignty over our traditional territory. What we are going to do is we are going to start setting up our own laws and start exercising our sovereignty over our traditional territory and we're not going to so much recognize the provincial jurisdiction over it. We have already sent a message to the Premier and the Aboriginal Minister that if they want to come to our territory they have to do it under our laws. That's the whole project we are working on. It's going to be all inclusive. Right now it's just with the land issue, but the end product is going to be all inclusive. It's going to be health, it's going to be housing, and it's going to be social programs, education, everything. We'll stick the end result of what we are starting here. We were kind of forced into that. We were kind of complacent. We were just taking it for granted that we would never be affected this way from the industry because we are so far up North. And it was kind of scary at times because throughout the three years we were struggling we felt so isolated. We didn't really hear from anybody, although we had a few phone calls and a few letters, some people came to see us. But all in all, we didn't have the support we wanted, either from other First Nations communities and stuff like that. We just didn't know what to do but all we knew was we just had to do something. And we did.

**FTT:** So for the supporters out there, Native and non-Native.

have a negative impact on our community. For people to support us they need to have the same level of understanding and awareness of how the governments and industry operate. So they know exactly what it is that they are supporting and how they can go about providing that support.

**LC:** We're also taking some training in the community with human rights and how to use international instruments. How to push Canada into signing the declaration, things like that. Also direct action planning, and Aboriginal treaty rights, and learning about case law, and learning about our own inherent laws from our own elders, and combining all that to build the community. Not only the people that are in the community, but try to do the outreach to the community that is outside, so that the nation is whole. So that the outside people are not excluded, but are informed and in alliance with the community, so the outside people are networking with the people inside. Because there are a lot of resources outside the community, like myself and other people that live outside the community that want to support the community. We have different areas of education and we can bring that resource to the community. Maybe not necessarily live in the community but to contribute to building the capacity of the community. That is really a positive result out of this whole situation: the

highway to symbolically show that we are leaving the prisons as free people. That alone in itself was very emotional. But also the fact that we were successful. We weren't really sure if we had a victory there but we knew we were walking out before 6 months were over. And it was good for our community, thinking about the reception of the people that were there and also in the community.

**LC:** Yeah, we organized ourselves to be there, and not only there. There was a lady council member who was at another institute but we had groups to go. It was just fantastic; we were just waiting anxiously for them to come out, we saw them coming out and it was just awesome.

**SM:** When we were walking out we saw all these people, and, we wanted to run, eh? And grab our garbage bags, our jail luggage. (laughing)

**LC:** That was the highlight and also when they came out of court. Waiting for us to come, very emotional.

**SM:** That was a very stressful day when we were in appeals court all day because we started at about 10am and we didn't get out until 5:30pm, it was a long day. Then we walked out free. That's amazing.

**LC:** One of the positive outcomes could be, and we still have to ascertain if it is, is that the Ontario government has released a management plan where they are going to protect certain areas,

225,000 sq. miles of land in Ontario, the boreal forest area. We're not certain where that is, if it includes KI territories, so we still have to figure out what the government of Ontario is talking about. But I've talked to some people; a lot of people are saying that is a direct result of the KI situation. So, hopefully the KI territory is protected. But that still remains to be seen because our area is rich with mineral resources and we know companies want those. Like, we have the mother load of platinum under the community. And platinum is very expensive in the market. So that remains to be seen. There's also wording that the minister released that is kind of lukewarm. Like his wording that has to come out 'prior and informed consent', 'meaningful consultation.' He wasn't using that language and he has to go back to the table with First Nations. We got to get the real thing, the right thing. So that's something you could be looking forward to. Maybe research and what's happening in Ontario about that because it's a very new press release. So that can be a positive outcome, or they just might leave KI, or open that area for mining. You know, that's also a possibility. So we don't know at this point. But hopefully they will protect that area. Because that's what we are saying, no mining in that area. We'll see.

**FTT:** Thanks a lot for the interview.



KI-6 Support Rally Toronto, ON April 2008

**SM:** It materialized after we got our appeal. They didn't have a case because he was going to challenge the contempt charges. This is our statement and this is what we are looking for. It is our next steps, these ones here. And there's a lot of work involved in that. That's a very huge undertaking to do all this.

for us to be effective in our struggle we need to educate ourselves. We need to do a lot of

**What's the best way people can support you guys?**

**SM:** For us, what I've come to realize is that in order

community outside working with the community inside. So we are not separated by a decision where they try to divide and conquer the community. Well, we are going to try and come together with everybody involved in our community. It's going to take some time to do that. It doesn't happen overnight.

**FTT:** On Facebook, I saw



KI-6 Support Rally March 2008

research and understand how the governments work, how the industry works, and how they collaborate together and all that based on their policies and registration. We need to understand those things so that we are in a better position to counteract those things that

**pictures of you guys coming out of the grounds. I wanted to know what you were thinking at that moment when you were walking out of the prison?**

**SM:** That was very emotional for us. Well, first of all we weren't supposed to do what we did, but we walked out. You know, you see that first picture where there's a big fence and a gate there. That's where they want everyone to be picked up, all the prisoners that were released, but we argued for the fact that we wanted to walk out of the compound to the



KI-6 Support Rally Toronto, ON April 2008

It's just four major components and there's a lot of work involved in that. What we are doing is we are going to start exercising our

and registration. We need to understand those things so that we are in a better position to counteract those things that

## Who is VCSC?

Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) is an organization working to build solidarity and support for Cuba in Vancouver, Canada and internationally. To do this, we organize frequent educational events, cultural events, conferences, mobilizations and actions in support of Cuba's sovereignty against Imperialist attacks and in defense of the gains of the Cuban revolution.

We also support 3 petition campaigns:

- 1- Against the US Blockade on Cuba
- 2- To Free the Cuban 5 held in US Jails

-3- To Extradite anti-Cuban Terrorist Luis Posada Carriles to Venezuela

Through petitioning throughout the lower mainland, at events, festivals, high schools and campuses, we engage with thousands of people about Cuba. Our work aims to bring Cuba, as a country making important social gains, to youth, students, women, Latin American people, people of the third world and other working and oppressed people in Canada, as an example of a building a better world.

We welcome new members and encourage everyone to get involved with VCSC to build a larger, stronger Cuba solidarity movement in Canada!

For more information contact:  
[cubacommunities@yahoo.ca](mailto:cubacommunities@yahoo.ca)  
 778-882-5223  
[vancubasolidarity.com](http://vancubasolidarity.com)



Since the imprisonment of the 5 Cuban Heroes in 1998, the biggest roadblock for the case has been a complete media blackout. The National Committee to Free the Cuban Five in the U.S. has launched a \$250,000 fund for a mass national media campaign. They are asking all individuals and organizations to do whatever possible in the raising of this urgently needed money.

To make a donation or to find out more about the "Five Heroes Freedom Fund" please check out

[www.freethethefive.org](http://www.freethethefive.org)  
 or  
[www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca](http://www.canadiannetworkoncuba.ca)





# Che Guevara, Thinker and Fighter! ★ ★ ★ Are His Ideas Relevant for the 21st Century?

*Vancouver Hosts Canada's 1st International Conference for Che Guevara*

## Keynote Speaker: Isaac Saney

The featured speaker on Friday was Isaac Saney, a professor at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia and the author of the wonderful and educational book, "Cuba: A Revolution In Motion". Isaac's dynamic presentation tackled the interconnection between Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution. He opened up some of Che's most important ideas. "Che was very important in terms of laying out the idea that in the construction of socialism, in the construction of a new society, it was people that mattered most, and it is important to build consciousness

the conference.

The second day of the conference, Saturday June 14<sup>th</sup>, began with the film, "Che: Love, Politics and Rebellion" which was the first Cuban-made documentary on Che. The morning was dynamically opened by MCs Colleen Glynn and Aaron Mercredi, who is an organizer with VCSC and the Indigenous Rights and Action Project. They welcomed up Tamara Hansen who read a warm and revolutionary greeting from the Cuban Embassy in Ottawa.

The first talk of the day was written by John Waller, the coordinator of the Pastors for Peace Caravan to Cuba, which was read by Aaron because John Waller was unable to travel to the conference. John's theme "Che and the New Human Being" perfectly outlined the ideas and issues covered in the day's program (*A transcription of this speech can be found in this issue of FTT!*). With over 200 participants throughout the day, and with exciting presentations from a number of prominent speakers, the film and John's talk laid an important foundation for the day.

## Workshop 1: Che & Latin America

Samira Amndan, a Diplomatic Attaché from the Venezuelan Consulate in Toron-

## Workshop 2: Cuban Youth & Che's Ideas

The two special guests who joined Samira were visiting directly from Havana, Cuba - Irma González Salanueva and Jairo Rodriguez Hernández. Irma is a young student leader at the University of Havana and the daughter of René González, one of the 5 Cuban Heroes currently held in US prisons. Irma is also a leader of the Union of Young Communists (UJC). Jairo is a student leader in the UJC in Havana as well as the Vice President of the University Students' Federation (FEU) in Havana Province.

They spoke animatedly about how Che's example and ideas are reflected in the young people of Cuba today, who are actively part of the Cuban Revolution. Irma explained a bit about the presence of Che while growing up in Cuba: "Jairo and I were born during the Revolution and we love it. We love it because we live

and to discuss all of the points raised by the morning's speakers.

## Workshop 3: Are Che's Ideas Relevant for Today?

The theme of this workshop was a question on everyone's mind. The speaker, Walter Lippmann, a long time social justice and Cuba solidarity activist who is currently the Editor-in-Chief of Cuba News, had an important job cut out for himself. Walter expressed, "Today, Che in my opinion is very much active

By Tamara Hansen

On June 13th and 14th 2008 Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) and Free the Cuban 5 Committee - Vancouver (2 member groups of the Canadian Network on Cuba) hosted Canada's first ever international conference on the ideas of renowned Latin American revolutionary leader Che Guevara. "Che Guevara, Thinker and Fighter! Are His Ideas Relevant for the 21st Century?" opened on Friday night with over 120 people in attendance. Activists and intellectuals from Canada, Cuba, Venezuela, the US, and the Middle East came to discuss the importance of Che's ideas today in a series of dynamic workshops and presentations.

The conference was opened by Friday evening's MCs, Colleen Glynn, president of the Federal



Isaac Saney



Conference opening night

New Democratic Party (NDP)-Richmond and an organizer with VCSC, and Tamara Hansen, co-ordinator of VCSC and executive member of the Canadian Network on Cuba. They welcomed everyone and explained how the conference would explore the importance of Che's ideas in the 21st century, 80 years after his birth. Tamara opened saying, "We have also got to ask ourselves: if Che were here today, what would he be calling for? And I think that the base for that would be unity. That as people who love and care about humanity and want and desire a better world, we need to come together despite our differences, despite our problems and work together to make this better world possible."

The opening also featured a ceremony by Indigenous Coast Salish elder, Kelly White, who said a few words about how Che inspires the struggle of Indigenous people and gave an offering of tobacco to the 5 guest speakers who came to the conference from out of town.



Samira Amndan

among the people. The Battle of Ideas has deepened itself, because not only does it have the ideological component of challenging imperialist values, but also has the material component of improving the conditions of Cubans, whether its through the social worker programs, whether it's the affirmative action programs that have aided very specific communities in Cuba, and even when we consider the internationalist programs which, while not formally part of the Battle of Ideas, are a very important adjunct to the Battle of Ideas. This is part and parcel of the same human factor, which is extremely important. I'm not trying to simply suggest that you can forget about the objective factors, but the human factor is very important."

Although Isaac began his talk explaining he didn't think he could speak for



Irma González

the whole hour and a half he was allotted, he did, and kept the audience's undivided attention throughout. His talk was met with a wild standing ovation which wrapped up the first evening of

to, spoke passionately about Che's impact on the Bolivarian process in Venezuela today.

She said, "Che is synonymous with the path that the present leadership of the Venezuelan revolution has taken, and obviously wishes to deepen. To evoke Che Guevara is to continue advancing the ideals of solidarity between people, of internationalism, of social justice, and of the fight against all forms of inequalities. To evoke the memory of Ernesto Guevara, really, is to re-

there and because we can enjoy everything. We can enjoy voluntary work, we can enjoy the rallies and we can enjoy the parties and we can



Jairo Rodriguez

enjoy it with humanness, and with people we love. Sometimes when we go out and we speak about Cuba, they ask us many questions. Some people like Cuba, some don't like Cuba, some criticize Cuba, some don't. And it's ok to criticize. The critical spirit is also in Che's example. But we always say that for us the Revolution has worked.

It has given us a lot. It has given us schools, medicine, but much more it has given us the love that today we try to promote in the world. And that's why every morning in our elementary schools our kids start their classes with the salute 'we will be like Che'. That's something they never forget, 'we will be like Che'."

The joint discussion period for the first two workshops soon opened the discussion on many questions

and very much alive. I remember before he was discovered in Bolivia, there was a wonderful Cuban cartoon after he had left Cuba, there was a picture of the globe and there were bullets flying all over in each direction all around this globe, and the caption of the cartoon reads 'but where's Che?' Well, today we see Che in the young Cubans who are here speaking with us. In the young Venezuelan leader who is here speaking with us, we see Che in the Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba, we see Che in the Henry Reid contingent of Cuban medical professionals who travel all over the world. "

Walter spoke more about his experience getting involved in Cuba solidarity and how in today's world, which is marked by social and economic crisis, Cuba and Che's ideas stand out as examples to follow. This led into a great discussion on

*continued on next page*





Walter Lippmann

*continued from previous page*

how to use Che's ideas today in the struggle for social justice.

#### **Workshop 4: Che in the Battle of Ideas, and What We Can Learn From It Here in Canada**

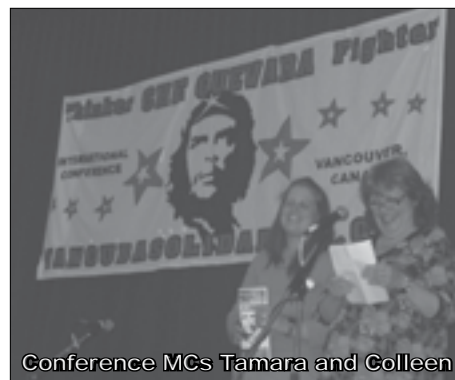
Ali Yerevani, political editor of the Fire This Time Newspaper, led the next workshop. He focused on Che and Cuba's example needing to be reflected in the struggle for justice and equality in Canada.

"The Battle of Ideas in fact is capitalism against socialism or socialism versus capitalism. Who ever knows Che Guevara knows very well that that was the central theme and thoughts that Che Guevara had. This conference is the Battle of Ideas, as I said, because basically, to be frank with you, this conference is about launching the battle of ideas, the battle of ideology. The organizers of this conference, with bringing Che Guevara as the central theme of discussion, are bringing the issue and notion of the battle of ideas here to Canada."

Ali spoke more about the state of progressive politics in Canada and the challenge of making change in this country. He concluded that the importance of this workshop was that, "the Battle of Ideas and Che's ideas are ideas that are consistent with human activity and the desire for change and a better world." Following Ali's talk was a lively discussion and debate about which way forward in the fight for social justice in general and in Canada.

#### **Workshop 5: Internationalism, Volunteer Work, and Che's Ideas**

Back by popular demand, the two Cuban guests Irma González and Jairo Rodríguez presented a second time in the final workshop. They emphasized that many of the projects that Cuba is known for, such as the internationalist doctor missions and volunteer work, are the result of Che's ideas in Cuba today. Jairo expressed with deep conviction that when we discuss revolution, internationalism and building consciousness, "Che Guevara demonstrated that only one revolutionary



Conference MCs Tamara and Colleen

cannot do anything. Cannot do anything."

Irma then highlighted the case of her father, René González, as one of the five Cuban Heroes and how they are a product of Che's ideas, as they sit in US prisons for defending their country against US-sponsored terrorism.

The final discussion period was quite emotional with many people speaking about how Che's ideas and the case of Irma's father have impacted them. Throughout the conference, participants were able to draw on their own experience, learn from those of others, and reflect on the importance of Che's spirit and the necessity of his ideas to build better and just world. The conference was truly a success and attracted many new people from different communities, from high school teenagers, to activists from older generations, and everyone in between. The oldest participant was 78 and the youngest 14-years-old. Conference attendees came from all continents, with a high participation of women and people of the third world. As the MCs Colleen and Aaron brought the event to a close, there was a booming applause from the audience and an excitement to come back next year for the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Che Guevara Conference.

#### **Conclusions**

"Che Guevara: Thinker and Fighter! Are His Ideas Relevant for the 21st Century?" marked a new step in Cuba solidarity work in Vancouver – a campaign for the ideas of Che Guevara. It is our belief that people in Canada know the image of Che Guevara, especially

young people, as you can find it on stickers, patches, t-shirts, etc. However, few people know the strong and important ideas behind the image. The conference was the first step in this campaign, but it is something VCSC & FC5C-Van plan to continue throughout the year. As the first conference of its kind in Canada, and as Che's ideas are only gaining more and more relevance in the world today, VCSC & FC5C-Van plan to make this important conference an annual event – We encourage everyone who loves Cuba to join us!

For updates as the year continues toward the next international conference please continue to visit the Conference blog for information:

<http://che2008vancouver.blogspot.com>



Conference MC Aaron Mercredi



Ali Yerevani

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# MAWO ADVANCES ANTIWAR WORK IN VANCOUVER AND CANADA

## 4 Months of Antiwar/Anti-Occupation Activities - May to August 2008

*By Janine Solanki*

Almost five years ago, on October 29<sup>th</sup> 2003, Mobilization Against War & Occupation (MAWO) was formed as a coalition of various students' unions, groups, community associations, social justice organizations and cultural collectives. Students, workers, youth, elders, immigrants and community members approached the formation of a broad-based, distinctly antiwar/anti-occupation coalition. At the forefront was establishing the method of organizing actions against this new era of war and occupation in a systematic and consistent fashion. To do this it was, and is, necessary to understand that it is unforeseeable to build any serious antiwar movement, across the world and especially in Canada, without a systematic and consistent approach. We also understood that consistency must combine with dynamism and must create momentum to grow. In order to sustain this protest movement, the education of organizers and activists within the antiwar movement is vital.

With this foundation in place, we always look to expand our work and connect with individuals and groups in Vancouver, across Canada and internationally. In Vancouver, this has meant broadening the reach of our activities, making antiwar politics something that everyone who is against war can get involved in. These efforts have been met with the participation of many new organizers and activists, both young and old, who come from the many ethnic com-

munities of which Vancouver is composed. They are people who are impacted by the wars at home and abroad, and when we open a space for involvement they are motivated to participate.

In united action and cooperation with national coalitions in the US and England, we develop a stronger platform for the antiwar movement. An important aspect of this cooperation has been calls for international days of action, which we have answered here in Vancouver by organizing rallies, marches and conferences.

This is the continued foundation of these last five years of work. With this snapshot of the last 4 months of organizing, we maintain our initial drive for consistent, dynamic, momentum-building work against this new era of war and occupation.

### Picket Actions:

As part of our 'Canada/NATO Out of Afghanistan' campaign, since 2005 we have organized 45 picket actions in front of the Canadian Armed Forces Recruitment center. On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, June 19<sup>th</sup>, July 28<sup>th</sup> and August 28<sup>th</sup> of 2008, we continued with our demand of "Canada/NATO Out of Afghanistan Now!" and calling for an independent public inquiry into Canada's occupation of Afghanistan. To media and people going by, these pickets expose the recent ongoing massacres which Canada carries out in Afghanistan, in front of the building where recruitment officers convince young people to kill innocent people for profit of the ruling class. In the last 4 months many speakers have addressed picketers and passers-bys. This has included Indigenous organizers and activists such as Kerri Goodwin, an Oji-Cree activist and organizer with MAWO, and Aaron Mercredi, a Métis activist and organizer with the Indigenous Rights and Action

Project. In addition, we have heard from long time activist David Whittlesey, a veteran of the US civil right movement and Vietnam antiwar movement. Students are also speaking out at the pickets, including high school, trades and university students. These consistent pickets always end with a resolve to keep organizing and to picket again the next month until this war drive is over.

### Petition Drives:

Also as part of this campaign, we have gathered over 14,000 signatures on our petition demanding "Canada Out of Afghanistan." These signatures are the result of MAWO organizers armed with clipboards hitting the streets twice a month. In May, April, June, July and August organizers spent a day collecting signatures at major intersections and transit hubs in greater Vancouver such as Broadway & Commercial, Surrey Central Skytrain station, or 49<sup>th</sup> Ave & Main St. This petition is more than just signatures – it is over 14,000 people we have talked to and who are convinced that Canada should end its war drive in Afghanistan. They are people who thought they would just go about a normal day, until we inserted into their day antiwar politics and the knowledge that they can get involved in antiwar organizing.

In four years of gathering signatures, we have also been able to gauge the response of people we have talked to. From 2004 when many people did not even know Canada was in Afghanistan, today people are approaching

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us and asking to sign as soon as they hear our demands. As sentiment against this brutal war drive grows, so does our documentation of it.

### **Rallies:**

Since the inception of MAWO, we established our consistent opposition to war and occupation through monthly antiwar rallies. Month after month, people walking by the Vancouver Art Gallery, a well-known place for rallies and public gatherings, see banners demanding "Canada Out of Afghanistan!" "US/UK Out of Iraq!" and "No War on Iran!" They find tables laden with information on this new era of war and occupation, and how they can get involved in organizing against it. People in Vancouver can depend on having the opportunity to gather together every month, picket signs in hand, and voice their opposition to war.

On May 31<sup>st</sup>, June 28<sup>th</sup> and August 23<sup>rd</sup> MAWO co-organized rallies with the Iranian Community Against War (ICAW). These rallies had many dynamic speakers representing the struggle of oppressed people around the world. Speakers included organizers of MAWO and ICAW, members of the Iranian community, Indigenous activists, union leaders and student

organizers. Bringing a cultural representation against war to the rallies, members of the Influents hip hop crew brought antiwar lyrics to reverberate through the downtown core.

With the escalation of the impending war on Iran, internationally coordinated actions against war on Iran are becoming ever more critical. On July 19<sup>th</sup>, MAWO together with ICAW participated in the International Weekend of Action called by the Iran Working Group of the US national antiwar coalition United for Peace and Justice. (<http://www.unitedforpeace.org>) Vancouver was included in the cities across the US that organized rallies and actions on this day, specifically against the escalating war drive against Iran. On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, MAWO and ICAW answered the callout from the Stop War on Iran Campaign based in New York, (<http://stopwaroniran.org>) which saw demonstrations in over 100 cities, from Vancouver to across the US and around the world. MAWO again has responded positively to an international call by Stop War on Iran Campaign for a rally on Saturday September 27<sup>th</sup> against the drive for war on Iran.

### **Cultural Events:**

The significance of cultural events in our fight against war cannot be forgotten. Throughout history to today, music, dance, poetry and all forms of art are used to convey resistance to oppression and to record the human face of struggle. With monthly cultural nights, we have had a chance to enjoy and be moved by artistic expressions against war. May 31<sup>st</sup>, June 29<sup>th</sup>, and July 19<sup>th</sup> were nights filled with poetry from people in struggle around the world. Films have been shown, such as "Sankara", which gave a view into the ongoing fight against the legacy of colonialism in Africa. Accompanied by dancing, music from Latin America, acoustic guitar and hip hop beats have all graced El Rancho Restaurant, the site of MAWO cultural nights. On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, MAWO and ICAW organized our first "Iranian Cultural Night Against War" which featured Iranian poetry, a film, and lessons on how to dance to Iranian music! Through this fun and interactive night, people had a chance to experience the beautiful Iranian culture which is now coming under attack.

### **Forums:**

Equal to the importance of direct actions, the education of organizers, activists and the

public is vital for the antiwar movement to advance. With at least 3 forums a month, participants have had much opportunity to discuss and develop ideas and arguments. We have approached our forums in two ways. One is with a monthly forum which travels to many areas in Greater Vancouver, to reach different communities. On May 27<sup>th</sup>, a forum titled "Canada in Afghanistan: War, Occupation, and Extension" went to the Metrotown branch of the Burnaby Public Library, and on June 30<sup>th</sup> a forum at the same location discussed the increasing war drive against Iran. On July 24<sup>th</sup>, MAWO and ICAW organized our first "No War on Iran" forum in North Vancouver, with the participation of many people from the Iranian community who live in that area. Also on the topic of Iran, on August 21<sup>st</sup> a forum was held at the Whalley Public Library in Surrey. These forums have seen media presentations and heard from many speakers including Ali Yerevani, (political editor of Fire This Time Newspaper), Arash Sharifi and Payvand Pejvack, all of whom are organizers with ICAW. On the topic of Afghanistan, audiences at these forums have also heard from Nita Palmer, a writer and researcher on Afghanistan for the Fire This Time Newspaper.

The other way we have approached forums is through our bi-monthly forum-classes, which are less formal presentation-and-discussion based forums in Vancouver. These have covered a range of topics relating to important aspects of the new era of war and occupation. In the last four months forum-classes have discussed: the increasing war drive against Iran; the issue of self-determination for all oppressed nations; the case of Alison Bodine (MAWO co-chair who is currently banned from Canada due to political targeting); the effects of the war on Afghanistan; the antiwar movement and the question of self-determination for Indigenous Nations; and the politics of sanctions against third world countries.

Whether they are forums aimed at the general public or forum-classes for organizers and activists, everyone is welcome to participate in helping us in developing our understanding and knowledge, some of our most important tools against this new era of war and occupation. We believe that in order to understand the necessity for change we need knowledge, and knowledge cannot be effective without action. Join us in bringing peace and better world for all.



## IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN

*continued from page 1*

forces for civilian killings, he does not represent the vast majority in Afghanistan who are demanding an immediate withdrawal of foreign troops from their country. "Daily we have headaches from the troops. We are fed up. Our government is weak and corrupt and the American soldiers have learned nothing," Malik Mohammad, a citizen of Ghani Khiei, said in an interview with the Associated Press.

The occupation forces are also facing a crisis in Afghanistan. More foreign troops died in Afghanistan

last month than any other month since the 2001 invasion, and attacks on foreign troops in Afghanistan are up 40% from last year, according to Major General Jeffery Schloesser, an American commander in Afghanistan.

After seven years of occupation, Afghans are sick of seeing their houses bulldozed and their crops ruined to make way for a new military highway. They are sick of living in constant fear of house raids and bombings. And so, with each bomb dropped by the occupiers, the Afghan resistance to the occupation increases. Today, it has reached such a point that, like the foreign forces in Iraq, Afghanistan's occupying forces are in a quagmire. They are unable to move forward against the resistance – and yet they are unwilling to pull out as they compete for control of the important trade markets of which Afghanistan sits in the middle.

The response of the imperialist countries to the increased resistance to the occupation has been to send more troops. Canada has sent recently in June 2008 an additional 200 troops, bringing the total Canadian forces operating in Afghanistan to 2,700, and the US has announced that they will be adding 4,500 troops to their force in Afghanistan. But increasing the troops will not solve the problem any more than it has solved the problem of occupation in Iraq. The instability, violence, and human suffering in Afghanistan are created by the Canada/NATO occupation forces and cannot be solved by them militarily. This is against human intelligence to say to Afghans that they are killed by occupation forces every day for the future of

Afghanistan, that their mothers, children, fathers, sisters, brothers and friends are being shot and brutalized for the sake of establishing democracy. Democracy in a simple definition is a huge institution, legitimized by the participation of masses of people. If a democracy is run by the generals and the army, if it is guarded by a higher and hierarchal military command, then we know for sure that Afghanistan has been turned into a proxy democracy, or better to say into a military base. However, to the bitterness of imperialists there is a single, simple solution to the occupation of Afghanistan which is on the tips of the tongues of millions of Afghans: Foreign Troops Out Now!

### Next Target: Iran

Sadly, the saga of destruction and misery opened by the new era of war and occupation, which has seen not only the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, but also the invasions of Haiti, Somalia and threats toward many other countries, does not end here. The ultimate target in the eyes of the imperialists is Iran. In fact, Afghanistan and Iraq, both sharing borders with Iran, are launching pads for an imperialist invasion of the country. Iran has been in the crosshairs of the US in particular since the Iranian revolution in 1979, when the Iranian people overthrew the US-backed Shah of Iran. Since then, Iran has stood up as a force of independent, anti-imperialist resistance in the Middle East. The US cannot establish their complete control and hegemony of the Middle East and further their strategic expansion into Central Asia without eliminating Iran as an independent country in the region which does not obey US dictates.

The imperialist campaign against Iran, led by the US and Israel, is stronger and harsher than ever now. There are currently three sets of UN sanctions as well as US and European Union sanctions aimed

at strangling the people of Iran and weakening them for attack. This is in addition to a massive military build-up in the Persian Gulf, and a huge media and propaganda campaign against Iran. As well, the US government announced that they were giving Israel the "amber light" to prepare for a potential invasion of Iran.

To be sure, any attack on Iran would have deadly and devastating consequences for that country of 70 million people, far greater than even the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. We must mobilize now, today, to protest threats of war and sanctions against Iran before an attack happens.



Protest against US troops in Kufa, Iraq June 2008

### No to War and Occupation! Yes to Self-Determination!

As ordinary peace-loving people in Canada, we have an important responsibility to our sisters and brothers in Afghanistan and around the world: to unite against war and occupation. The same Canadian ruling class which has so savagely attacked people in Afghanistan, is also eating away at our rights here at home. We must join together with Iraqi and Afghan people and with Iranian people to demand:

Canada/NATO Out of Afghanistan!

US/UK Out of Iraq!

Hands Off Iran!

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# Pride and Dignity

**By Manuel E. Yepe\***

## AGAINST WIND AND RAIN

The air of pride and dignity being breathed in Cuba in the days following the onslaught of a succession of atmospheric phenomena that swept through the Cuban archipelago in less than three weeks can only be compared with the air breathed here after the revolutionary victory at Bay of Pigs in 1961, or the collective ability to resist with dignity the worst dangers, displayed by the Cuban people after the Missile Crisis in October 1962.

From late August to mid-September, four tropical storms, two of which rose to the category of high-intensity hurricanes, provoked unprecedented destruction and damage in the infrastructures of the nation's 14 provinces and the special municipality of Isle of Youth.

It is estimated that 50 percent of the crops were lost nationwide.

About 340,000 homes were damaged (of which 30,000 were razed) and many schools, hospitals, clinics, factories, warehouses, tobacco-drying barns and buildings for the raising of animals and other farm and industrial purposes suffered considerable damage.



**Repairs in Havana after Hurricane Gustav**

The nickel industry, Cuba's main export product, was paralyzed and will have to await the repair of its installations and mines for several days before resuming production.

The tourism industry, in addition to being affected by the cancellation of flights and hotel reservations, was seriously damaged, in terms of its infrastructure and the natural, architectural and cultural patrimony that girds its promotion.

Almost 4 million people were evacuated to protect their lives in less than a month, with multimillion-dollar expenses in transportation, food, medical attention and police custody of personal effects in the evacuated areas, but the humanitarian effort produced the expected results. Only 11 people were killed, almost all of them because of negligence in the observance of the protective measures set up by a Civil Defense Service whose excellence is recognized worldwide and is the pride of all Cubans.

Cuba takes pride in its efficient organization and broad participation in the defensive tasks against catastrophes, especially because of the priority given to the protection of human lives. This time, we learned about true acts of heroism, individual and collective, some of which were captured on film by journalists. Word of most of those acts was spread by mouth and sometimes exaggerated by the people's admiration.

Wide recognition has been given to the intense and extensive participation of the armed forces and the police and firemen corps in rescue actions where they placed their own lives in jeopardy.

A singular demonstration of the level of inclusion of Cuban women in managerial responsibilities is the fact that two of the regions worst affected by the hurricanes have Defense Councils led by women who are also top leaders of the Communist Party. They demonstrated great managerial control and efficiency in the coordination of all the urgencies and brilliantly kept the citizens informed of events, in their territories and nationwide, through their appearances in the media.

The media performed in an outstanding manner when covering the tense situation that lasted for several days in places isolated because of the inclemency of the winds, the floods and the debris. The memory of radio listeners, TV watchers and readers has recorded the names of a large number of colleagues, many women among them, who did their job with the self-denial demanded by that profession.

After the storm, the acts of generosity and valor by electrical and communications workers and construction workers of all specialties did not cease but multiplied. It is up to them now, with the support of all residents, to rebuild the communities, the homes and the public buildings that were destroyed or damaged.

Amid the panorama of destruction left

behind by nature, Cuban men and women are stimulated by the dignity with which the government of their country has responded to the petulancy and arrogance with which the Government of the United States has attempted to humiliate this

**Rafil Castro visits the Isle of Youth after the hurricanes**



nation by imposing conditions to an aid that would therefore lack the value of solidarity that, no doubt, is the real will of our noble American neighbors.

*\*Manuel E. Yepe Menéndez is a lawyer, economist and journalist. He is a professor at the Higher Institute of International Relations in Havana. He was Cuba's ambassador to Romania, general director of the Prensa Latina agency; vice president of the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television; founder and national director of the Technological Information System (TIPS) of the United Nations Program for Development in Cuba, and secretary of the Cuban Movement for the Peace and Sovereignty of the Peoples.*



# Orgullo y Dignidad Contra Viento y Marea

*Por Manuel E. Yepe\**

El ambiente de orgullo y dignidad que se respira en Cuba en estos días posteriores al paso destructor de una sucesión de fenómenos atmosféricos que arrasaron todo el archipiélago cubano en menos de tres semanas, solo es comparable con el que se respiró aquí tras la victoria revolucionaria de Playa Girón en 1961, o el que generó la capacidad colectiva de resistir con dignidad los peores peligros de que dio muestras el pueblo cubano durante la Crisis de los Cohetes en octubre de 1962.

Desde fines de agosto hasta mediados de septiembre, 4 tormentas tropicales, 2 de las cuales con categoría de ciclones de gran intensidad, provocaron destrucción y daños sin precedentes en las infraestructuras de las 14 provincias del país y en el municipio especial de la Isla de la Juventud.

Se calculó la pérdida del 50% de las cosechas a nivel de todo el país.

Sufrieron daños unas 340 mil viviendas (30 000 de ellas destruidas) y una buena parte de las escuelas, hospitales, policlínicas, fábricas, almacenes, secaderos de tabaco y naves para la cría de animales y otros propósitos agropecu-



Raul Castro y atletas olímpicos cubanos

arios e industriales experimentaron considerables perjuicios.

La industria del níquel, principal producto cubano de exportación, fue paralizada y tendrá que esperar por la reparación de sus plantas y minas varios días antes de reiniciar sus producciones.

El turismo, además de ser afectado por la cancelación de vuelos y reservaciones de alojamiento, sufrió graves averías en la infraestructura y el patrimonio natural, arquitectónico y cultural que sustenta su promoción.

Casi cuatro millones de personas fueron evacuadas para proteger sus vidas en menos de un mes con gastos multimillonarios en transporte, alimentación, atención médica y custodia policial de bienes en los lugares evacuados, pero el esfuerzo humanitario dio los frutos esperados y solo hubo que lamentar once muertes, casi todas debidas a negligencias en el cumplimiento de las medidas de protección dispuestas por un servicio de defensa civil cuya excelencia es mundialmente reconocida y orgullo de las cubanas y los cubanos.

Cuba se precia de la eficiente organización y amplia participación en las tareas defensivas contra catástrofes, especialmente por la prioridad que éstas brindan a la salvaguarda de vidas humanas y, en esta ocasión, se conoció de verdaderos actos de heroísmo individuales y colectivos, de los cuales algunos permitieron

constancia gráfica periodística, aunque la mayoría trasciende oralmente, a veces exagerados los hechos por la admiración popular.

Se ha reconocido ampliamente la participación tan intensa y extensa que han tenido las fuerzas armadas y los cuerpos de policía y bomberos en acciones de salvamento en las que han puesto en riesgo sus propias vidas.

Una singular demostración del nivel de inclusión de la mujer cubana en las responsabilidades de dirección permitió el hecho de que dos de las regiones más gravemente afectadas por los huracanes tienen al frente de sus respectivos Consejos de Defensa a mujeres que, por su condición de máximas dirigentes del Partido Comunista, les está asignada la función. Ellas demostraron mucha ejecutividad y eficiencia en la coordinación de todas las urgencias del momento y brillantemente mantuvieron

al tanto de lo que acontecía a la ciudadanía de sus territorios así como a la opinión pública nacional, a través de los medios de prensa que pudieron mantener activos.

También sobresalió el papel de los medios en la cobertura periodística de la tensa situación que se extendió por varios días en lugares aislados por las inclemencias de los vientos, las inundaciones y los destrozos. En la memoria de radioyentes, televidentes y lectores quedaron grabados los nombres de un gran número de colegas, muchas mujeres inclusive, que presentaron credenciales con la abnegación que reclama esta profesión.

Un hombre Cubano fija su azotea cañada en las Tres Palmas



Y tras la tormenta no han cesado, sino que se multiplican, los actos de generosidad y valor por parte de los trabajadores de la electricidad y las comunicaciones, así como de los constructores de todas las especialidades a quienes corresponde ahora, con el apoyo de todos los pobladores, la reconstrucción de las comunidades, las viviendas y los edificios públicos destruidos o dañados.

En medio del panorama de destrucción y de proezas que ha dejado la naturaleza, las cubanas y los cubanos se sienten estimulados por la dignidad con que el gobierno de su país ha respondido a la petulancia y la prepotencia con que el gobierno de los Estados Unidos ha pretendido humillar a este pueblo, imponiéndole condiciones a una ayuda que así carecería del valor solidario que, sin dudas, es voluntad real del noble pueblo norteamericano vecino.



*\*Manuel E. Yepe Menendez es periodista y se desempeña como Profesor adjunto en el Instituto Superior de las Relaciones Internacionales de La Habana.*



# REFLECTIONS OF FIDEL

## *The Good-Guy Role, at Whose Expense?*

When the U.S. government hypocritically offered \$100,000 as aid in the face of the disaster brought about by Hurricane Gustav, subject to an on-site inspection to confirm the damage, the response was that Cuba is unable to accept any donations from the country that is blockading us; that the damage had already been calculated and that what we were calling for was that it not prevent the export of essential materials and credits associated with commercial operations.

Certain people in the North starting screaming their heads off that Cuba's rejection was inconceivable.

A few days later, when Ike lashed the country from Punto de Maisí to Cabo de San Antonio, the neighbors of the North were a bit more subtle. They sweetened their language. They talked of aircraft ready to leave with materials worth \$5 million; that it wouldn't be necessary to assess because they had already done so by their own means, which cannot be any other than spying on our country. This time they would put the Revolution in a predicament, so they believed; if they [the Cubans] dared to reject the offer, they would find themselves in problems with the population. Perhaps they thought that nobody had seen the images broadcast by U.S. television of the UN occupation forces in Haiti dispatching food to a hungry population who fought for it across barbed wire fencing, with the result of even children being injured.

Hunger in that country is the fruit of the historic and ruthless plunder of nations. Right there, in Les Gonaïves, our doctors were risking their lives helping the population of that city as they are doing in almost 100 percent of that nation's municipalities. That cooperation continues there, as in dozens of nations of the

world, despite hurricanes. The categorical response to the new and astute Note was: "our country cannot accept a donation from the government that is blockading us, although it is disposed to buy indispensable materials that U.S. companies place on the export market, and requests authorization for supplies of the same, as well as the credits that are normal in all commercial operations."

"If the government of the United States does not wish to do this on a permanent basis, the government of Cuba requests that it authorize this for the next six months, particularly taking into account the damage occasioned by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, and that the most dangerous months of the cyclone season are yet to come."

It was not made arrogantly, because that is not Cuba's style. It can be appreciated in the Note that the idea was modestly expressed of how the prohibition being suspended for a limited time period would be sufficient for us.

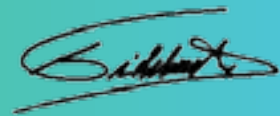
Carlos Gutiérrez, the U.S. secretary of commerce, discounted any temporary lifting of the blockade on Friday the 12th.

It is obvious that the government of that powerful country cannot understand that the dignity of a people has no price. The wave of solidarity with Cuba, ranging from large to small countries with resources and even without resources, would disappear on the day that Cuba ceases to be honourable. Those in our country who are upset about that are totally mistaken. If it was \$1 billion instead of \$ 5 million, they would meet the same response. There is no way to pay for the harm to thousands of lives and the suffering, or the more than \$200 billion that the blockade and Yankee aggressions have cost.

The partial official report explains to the people that, in less than 10 days, the country was affected by damages assessed at more than \$5 billion. But it was also explained that those figures were based on historical and conventional prices that have nothing to do with reality. The very clear explanation that, "calculations on the loss of housing stock are based on historical and conventional prices, not the real value in international prices," should never be forgotten. Suffice it to note that in order to have an enduring housing stock that can resist the strongest winds, one element is required, which is in very short supply: a workforce. This is needed both for temporary repairs and for lasting construction. That workforce has to be divided among all the other centers of production and services, some of which were significantly damaged, hence the real value of homes in the world and recouping the corresponding investment is many times greater."

The blow from Nature was severe, but it is also heartening to know that there will be no truce or respite in our battle.

The economic crisis that is hitting the United States and, as a consequence, the rest of the nations of the world, has no definitive response; but here, yes, there are responses to natural disasters and to any attempts to put a price on our dignity.



Fidel Castro Ruz

September 16, 2008

7:54 p.m.



# El papel de bueno, ¿a costa de quién?

Cuando el gobierno de Estados Unidos ofreció hipócritamente 100 mil dólares como ayuda frente a la catástrofe ocasionada por el huracán Gustav previa inspección in situ para comprobar daños, se le respondió que Cuba no podía aceptar donación alguna del país que nos bloquea; que ya habían sido calculados los daños y lo que reclamábamos era que no se prohibiera la exportación de los materiales indispensables y los créditos asociados a las operaciones comerciales.

Algunos en el Norte se desgañaron gritando que era inconcebible el rechazo de Cuba.

Cuando el Ike pocos días después azotó el país desde Punta de Maisí al Cabo de San Antonio, los vecinos del Norte fueron un poco más hábiles. Dulcificaron el lenguaje. Hablaron de aviones listos para partir con productos por valor de cinco millones de dólares; que no sería necesario evaluar, porque ya lo habían hecho por sus propios medios, que no pueden ser otros que los de espiar a nuestro país. Esta vez sí que pondrían en aprietos a la Revolución —pensaban—; si se atrevían a rechazar la oferta, se buscarían problemas con la población. Tal vez se creyeron que nadie había visto las imágenes divulgadas por la televisión de Estados Unidos cuando las fuerzas de ocupación de la ONU repartían alimentos en Haití a la población hambrienta que se los disputaba a través de una

cerca de alambres de púa, dando lugar incluso a niños heridos.

El hambre en ese país es fruto del saqueo histórico y despiadado de los pueblos. Allí mismo, en Gonaïve, nuestros médicos arriesgaban su vida asistiendo a la población de esa ciudad, así como lo hacen en casi el ciento por ciento de los municipios de esa nación. Esa cooperación prosigue allí como en decenas de naciones del mundo, a pesar de los huracanes. A la nueva y astuta Nota, se le respondió categóricamente: “nuestro país no puede aceptar una donación del gobierno que nos bloquea, aunque está

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los materiales indispensables que las empresas norteamericanas exportan a los mercados, y solicita la autorización para el suministro de los mismos, así como de los créditos que son normales en todas las operaciones comerciales.

“Si el gobierno de Estados Unidos no desea hacerlo definitivamente, el de Cuba solicita que al menos lo autorice du-

rante los próximos seis meses, en especial si se toman en cuenta los daños ocasionados por los huracanes Gustav e Ike, y que aún faltan los meses más peligrosos de la temporada ciclónica.”



No se hacía con altanería, porque no es el estilo de Cuba. En la propia Nota se puede apreciar cómo se expresaba con modestia la idea de que nos bastaba con que se suspendiera la prohibición por un limitado período de tiempo.

El secretario de Comercio de Estados Unidos, Carlos Gutiérrez, descartó el viernes 12 que se levantara de forma temporal el bloqueo.

Es obvio que el gobierno de ese poderoso país no puede comprender que la dignidad de un pueblo no tiene precio. La ola de solidaridad con Cuba, que abarca a países grandes y pequeños, con recursos y hasta sin recursos, desaparecería el día en que Cuba dejara de ser digna. Se equivocan rotundamente los que en nuestro país se disgusten por ello. Si en vez de cinco millones fuesen mil millones, se encontrarían la misma respuesta. El daño en miles de vidas, sufrimientos y más de 200 mil millones de dólares que han costado el bloqueo y las agresiones yanquis, no pueden pagarse con nada.

En el informe oficial parcial se le explicó al pueblo que en menos de diez días el país había

sido afectado en más de cinco mil millones de dólares. Pero también se explicó que esas cifras eran a precios históricos y convencionales, que nada tenían que ver con la realidad. No debe ser olvidada nunca la explicación bien clara de que “los cálculos de las pérdidas en viviendas son sobre la base de precios históricos y convencionales, y no los valores reales a precios internacionales. Baste señalar que para disponer de una vivienda duradera que resista los más fuertes vientos, se requiere un elemento indispensable que escasea mucho: la fuerza de trabajo. Esta se necesita lo mismo para una reparación temporal que para una construcción duradera. Dicha fuerza hay que repartirla en todos los demás centros de producción y servicios, algunos significativamente dañados, por lo que el valor real de una vivienda en el mundo y la amortización de la inversión correspondiente es muchas veces mayor.”

El golpe de la naturaleza fue contundente, pero también es alentador conocer que no habrá tregua ni descanso en nuestra lucha.

La crisis económica que golpea a Estados Unidos, y como consecuencia a los demás pueblos del mundo, no tiene respuesta definitiva; en cambio, sí la tienen los desastres naturales en nuestro país y todo intento de poner precio a nuestra dignidad.

Fidel Castro Ruz

Septiembre 16 de 2008

7 y 54 p.m.



# Che Guevara, the “New Man” and the Construction of Socialism

*By John Waller\**

*This presentation was originally given at the “Che Guevara, Thinker and Fighter! Are His Ideas Relevant for the 21st Century?” conference held in Vancouver, BC, June 13-14 2008.*

Ernesto Che Guevara made many outstanding contributions to the struggle for a more just world on both a practical and theoretical level. Today I want to focus only on a certain part – his ideas about a transition to socialism which relate both to economics and to the creation of what he termed in his lifetime the “new man” but which I am sure if he had lived longer he would have corrected to the “new person”. And in what I say I will of course talk about the Cuban revolution.



John Waller

history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing”. What Che emphasized was that in struggling to build socialism from out of the entrails of capitalist society, people also have to re-make themselves. They have to struggle to overcome all the individualistic, egocentric and generally messed up parts of who they are, that growing up within capitalism has created in their personas. Neither Che, nor Fidel, nor Raul, were born as new men – they have had to struggle to become so. My view is that an important part of why the Cuban revolution has largely resisted bureaucratic degeneration is because its leadership, and many of its activists, have striven to remake themselves, to ‘be like Che’ – and to put the interests of their people, and humanity, above their own personal desires. As I read the current interviews with Mariela Castro about how the Cuban revolution is overcoming its legacy of homophobia – and her debates with her own father – Raul Castro – I see glimpses of that process at work.

All too often Left wing organizations have reduced the notion of leadership to having the ‘correct line’. Ordinary people know better. When you are in struggle and your back is to the wall – sure you want leaders with strategic wisdom and good ideas about how to move forward. But you also want leaders in whose human qualities of integrity and commitment you trust, to

of how you motivate people to work under socialism. Capitalism basically treats workers like donkeys – it hits them with sticks or it bribes them with carrots. The sticks are the threat of dismissal or demotion, the carrots are bonus payments, productivity deals and other perks.

Any true socialist society has to largely throw away the sticks. It is, and indeed should be, pretty hard to sack somebody in Cuba – with its powerful unions taking care of worker’s interests. But can socialism be built solely with the ‘carrots’ of wage payments. Che said no, and he was and is right. Way back in the early 1960s he predicted the demise of the Soviet Union and Eastern European societies because they were, at best, trying to build socialism using capitalist methods.

So under socialism what other methods can be used to motivate workers? Che talked about moral incentives. Even under capitalism many people work, at least in part, for non-material “moral” motives. We see this in how many people go into caring professions as nurses, or teachers, or social workers, often accepting lower pay than they would receive in the private sector. We see it too in the pride that many people take in “a job well done”. We also see it in the ways people can be motivated to work for the good of their country – though of course capitalism uses this motivation for its own, often horribly xenophobic, ends.

Moral incentives for Che meant the struggle to create New People – people who would be motivated to work for the good of others, for the betterment of society, and for the



the volunteer construction brigades of the late 80s. And Cuba would not have survived the incredibly harsh deprivations of the Special Period in the 1990s without the foundations of political consciousness laid by those campaigns.

But when resources are focused on a campaign, resources have to be diverted away from other things. This can be seen in Fidel’s crusade that failed – the attempt in 1968 to harvest 10 million tons of sugar. In my view it failed not because it only got to 8.5 million tons, which was still a very creditable achievement, but because of the disruption it caused in other parts of the economy as everything was diverted to the sugar harvest.

The hard question, which I so wish Che was here right now to give his own answer, is how much do you need to make use of material incentives, higher wages, productivity bonuses etc in running the totality of an economy, every day, away from the glamour of the

significantly raise the price paid to farmers for their produce.

The Western media asks, self interestedly, is Raul a ‘reformer’ who will lead Cuba down a Chinese style return to capitalism? I am sure he is not – but the risk is there. Which is why, at the same time that the Cuban government is focused on reintroducing proper material incentives, it also has to be continually boosting the moral incentives.

As Fidel has been saying since the late 90s – the current world order is socially, economically and environmentally unsustainable and will inevitably be replaced. The question is what will replace it. To build a better world we need, in Cuba and everywhere, Che’s New Person, Che’s belief in humanity and its capacity to act based on morality rather than economic self-interest alone. Fidel has correctly framed the debate as a “Battle of Ideas” – but many of the sharpest ideas in that battle come from Che. I want to

Since the first socialist revolution in Russia and its degeneration into Stalinism, socialist organizations and parties have struggled with how to remain both models of true democracy and sufficiently organized to be able to oppose and eventually overthrow the highly organized capitalist state. But all too often the proclaimed model of Democratic Centralism has become in reality Un-Democratic Centralism. People have debated about structures, the rights and wrongs of the Leninist model of the party, and so on. That debate has its place – but I contend that no matter what democratic structures you put in place, if the top leadership is determined to subvert them in its own interests then eventually they will most likely succeed. The solution is either an anarchist ‘no leaders’ model – which I personally reject because it is ineffective and usually has its own ‘hidden’ leaders – or it is to be found in Che’s concept of the New Person. Marx said – “men make

know that they aren’t going to sell you out at some point. People will go, and have gone, to hell and back following leaders like Che, Fidel, Raul, and Chavez. But when asked to follow so many Left groups and parties, with their leadership cliques, petty personality cults, and decidedly “old men” in charge – people think otherwise, and such leaders remain little generals without any troops.

I now want to look at Che’s ideas about how, after a revolution has seized state power, it has to organize society economically to ensure that it is building socialism, and not a return to capitalism. In my analysis I draw heavily on the book by the Cuban economist and communist Carlos Tablada entitled *Che Guevara: Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism*. It is published by Pathfinder Books – and if there are copies on sale today I strongly recommend you buy it

Che was addressing the question

progress of the revolution, the nation and the world – because of course in revolutionary Cuba taking pride in ones own nation has always been linked to a spirit of internationalism. In societies like Canada and the US there are individual doctors who go off to serve in disaster zones when earthquakes or tsunamis have hit. Only in revolutionary Cuba can thousands of volunteers be found. This is Che’s legacy.

But Che was not a naïve idealist. He recognized that the new person had to be created in struggle, and that for a long time to come material incentives would be necessary. Cuba never abolished wage differentials, it significantly narrowed them. Che emphasized the importance of people acquiring training and skills, and said that they should be materially rewarded for that. Carlos Tablada outlines how, after Che’s death, some of his followers took his ideas to an extreme in Cuba – arguing that material incentives could simply be abolished.

But many in the Cuban leadership did think that Che was too idealistic about people’s potential – as I would phrase it – while it is good to aspire to be like Che, one also has to recognize that he was an exceptional human being. Can a society be truly run based on being like Che?

What does Fidel think? Well Fidel has shown his skills over half a century at running a country – and Fidel has always been in his guts a believer in moral incentives. Time and again in modern Cuban history Fidel has roused the nation to a moral crusade – the mass literacy campaign of 1961, the 300,000 volunteers who fought in Angola in the 1970s and 80s,

high profile campaign – when people are doing a job like cleaning floors which isn’t the least bit glamorous. This is the question that Cuba’s leadership is grappling with now in very specific circumstances.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the overnight loss of 90% of its foreign trade precipitated an enormous economic crisis in Cuba. Seventeen years later, on an aggregate level, Cuba has emerged from that crisis. But due to some of the absolutely necessary measures to overcome the crisis – such as mass tourism, joint ventures with foreign capital and legalized self-employment – Cuba has emerged bearing social and economic scars. Economically the society is much more divided, and worse than that, the people with the largest incomes are often not the ones who have worked hardest or are the best trained. Rather they are the people who, legally or illegally, derive income from tourists, or receive significant remittances from relatives abroad. All of us who know Cuba well know the tales of hotel waiters who earn (in tips) vastly more than a brain surgeon or a government minister.

A situation where official state wages (apart from the hard currency bonuses many state workers do receive) buy very little in the shops is socially corrosive in the long term. As Cubans, with their marvelous capacity for cutting irony, tell the joke “they pretend to pay us, we pretend to work”. The current Cuban leadership is very clear that what Cuba needs right now is a strong dose of the correct material incentives – as opposed to the totally perverse incentives that currently exist in some sectors of the economy. That is why one of Raul’s first acts as president was to

end by saying something about Che and what will happen on Sunday. A quote from Che that used to be on the door to my room in Vancouver said “Words that aren’t matched by deeds are unimportant” but the text was highlighted in a certain way so that what stood out was “Words match deeds important”.

On Sunday the route of the Pastors for Peace Caravan to Cuba that begins in Victoria and Vancouver will be crossing the border at Blaine and we want to have the largest possible presence there at the border to celebrate the crossing, as well as to make sure that no US customs official even thinks about trying to bar the aid from entering the US. If Che was here today he would be saying to you – join me at the border on Sunday.

How do I know that? I think back to a conference of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign in Britain in 1994. I was proposing a motion that we should send members of our campaign on the annual Pastors for Peace caravan. Che wasn’t there but his spirit was present, personified by his daughter Aleida. She was the keynote guest speaker. But when it came to the time for motions and I proposed mine, when the chairperson asked for speakers in favor, breaking all protocol Aleida’s hand shot up and she made an impassioned speech on the importance of those caravans as both practical and symbolic challenges to the US blockade.

The words around ideas at this conference are very important. But on Sunday join the spirit of Che in action.

*\*John Waller is a long-time Cuba solidarity activist and the International Coordinator of the Pastors for Peace Caravan to Cuba.*

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# Carlos Lage Davila's Speech to Municipal People's Power Assembly Presidents

June 2008



A CubaNews translation  
Edited by Walter Lippmann

Comrades:

It would be neither possible nor necessary to talk about all the topics we have discussed here in the last three days, so I have selected some of them:

As a result of the economic effects of the sharp rise in the price of fuel, food and almost everything we import and our priority efforts to plan on the basis of our available resources, there have been cuts in some major investment programs, and further reductions are bound to follow. But none will be abandoned, as this is only an adjournment while we streamline their scopes.

This urgent economic situation has led to investment plans more in keeping with our current building capacity, which will make it possible to cut costs, meet deadlines and, contradictory though it may sound, step up our progress.

detailed preparations, including sufficiently advanced projects.

- The workers are part of the planning, so they must be selected in advance and never reassigned to other works.

- Before work starts, the investor and the constructor must agree on a strict and precise timetable and demand that it be fulfilled without excuse.

- Once started, work must proceed nonstop until the end. Organizing two or even three shifts a day may be justified in some cases.

- The ultimate purpose must be to have highly productive eight-hour working days. Where construction is concerned, overtime is almost always the consequence of low productivity during the regular working hours.

- Steps must be taken to provide the proper work clothes and shoes, meals and living conditions, which are no less necessary than the construction materials needed to do the job.

We feel anger, and rightly so, when we are told that a certain amount of money was lost owing to, say, a wrongly signed contract. However, we put up with delays as if they were the most natural thing in the world, even if in those cases we end up losing a lot more money in revenues we never get to receive. Time is also an economic resource that we can measure in convertible pesos.

Concerning the housing program, this is what we learned in the last two years:

housing plan from having to seek private help to move the materials or take care of any other task.

- A house can only be deemed finished when delivered to its dweller. Meeting the requirements to fulfill the job cannot allow for fraud. Our prime demand is that the reports be truthful, and then ask about the progress of the plans, and that goes too for any conservation and rehabilitation work. This year we aim to undertake 110,000 conservation and 140,000 rehabilitation actions, more than ever before, in line with the priorities identified by deputies and delegates from every constituency, but we must make sure the reported figures really square with the work performed and its magnitude.

The old problem of insufficient maintenance at almost all levels of production and service is no doubt related to the shortage of resources and labor, but it's also a matter of culture, priority—or lack of it—and poor planning.

Important plans are under way to reconstruct and retrofit health institutions, schools, service centers and many other factories and establishments. It would be pointless to keep repairing polyclinics or hospitals if we're not capable of maintaining those already repaired.

Maintenance

in decisions about annual priorities, since as we know, not all things can be solved right away, and many need a longer time.

Today's emphasis in the importance of planning and discipline in performance, as instructed by comrade Raúl, also comprises a greater involvement of the Boards of Directors at municipal and provincial level in designing plans.

From the Battle of Ideas, triggered and guided by Fidel, countless programs of great social consequence were drawn and boosted which reaffirm our Revolution's sense of justice and solidarity.

People with disabilities, children who are underweight and undersized for their age or whose normal growth is affected by any other biological or social factor, senior citizens who live alone, patients with low-prevalence illnesses who need special care, youths who neither study nor work or are otherwise prone to



Carlos Lage visits oil refinery in Havana October 2008

Nonetheless, our investment plan for 2008 is 29% higher than last year's and 2.4 times that of the year 2000.

As we speak, and given the urgent need to increase our construction capacity, the Ministry of Construction and a Political Bureau Commission are making a comprehensive revision of the construction program, and all the necessary steps will be taken in due course.

But one thing cannot wait that is essential for any program to succeed: discipline in carrying out the works.

Our Boards of Directors must give support to and demand the following:

- Full control of material resources in building sites. Control by the managers and the workers alike. Rather than asking whether the work will be finished on schedule, they must ask –and check– whether anything has been stolen. And I am not talking about deficits or diversion of resources, but using the right term. A boss's prime task is to make sure that nothing is stolen from the premises.
- Every work must be part of the economic plan; therefore, they must be able to count from the outset on all the resources they need.
- Construction work must be preceded by

· We need to produce more prefabricated construction materials, a fact imposed by the lack of sufficient skilled labor and transportation means. Molds, double shifts and measures to eliminate bottlenecks in the production line are some alternatives worth considering in every factory while we wait for centralized decisions about new investments.

· The steady efforts of People's Power-run construction brigades engaged in housing and repair work in every municipality is extremely important, and they are and will be supported with working instruments and means by the Ministry of Construction (MICONS) and the Housing Institute. Besides, the Ministry's provincial delegations must reinforce the construction brigades devoted exclusively to housing, as these workers should not be used to resolve backlogs in other sites or undertake new works outside the plans.

· It is at municipal level where the housing plans for 2009 should be designed. By allocating resources in the same way we used in 2008, the municipal office will propose what housing developments should be started, continued or terminated, so that we give priority to the most serious and pressing problems in every place.

· We must never abandon the principle of widespread popular participation. Families, communities and workplaces must join the construction brigades after working hours and through voluntary work mobilizations. There must be a great spirit of solidarity, and measures to prevent anyone involved in the

should be our top priority when allocating resources anywhere. What we have we must use first to maintain and then to grow.

Seeing destroyed and out of order what was once in shipshape condition and operating properly is unfortunately a common occurrence, the consequence of not devoting to maintenance the amount of time and degree of demand that we do new investments.

The Boards of Directors at provincial and municipal level, as well as the State Central Administration bodies, must understand that unity means progress. We can and must work harder to answer to and meet people's needs. It is the duty of the above bodies and the People's Power to give the delegates all the necessary information and support to provide a solution or an answer to every problem. All municipalities should study each and every statement made in the current account-rendering process, the first to be held in this term of office. If a matter cannot be solved or there is not enough information to give about it, it must be submitted to the provincial authorities, and from there to the Council of Ministers, where we will meet to evaluate the outcome of this process.

We will be better prepared to answer people's questions insofar as we know each one of their statements and strengthen our economic plans.

A plan to produce construction materials and asphalt, build dwellings, provide street lighting and waterworks, etc., will make it possible at municipal and provincial level to have a say



Carlos Lage (L), Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, (C) & Cuban President Raul Castro (R)

become marginals or criminals, convicts and ex-convicts: they are not just a cold set of statistics, but people who have a name and are taken care of by social workers, political organizations and other community factors and forces.

Not one of them can go unattended. That is a unique privilege of our Socialist Society, made possible by 40,000 young social workers. Conditions have been created as well to see to their material needs and gradually satisfy their needs, starting with the most critical solutions.

Controlling our resources and saving everything, and especially fuel and food, has become an essential, decisive need that cannot be postponed.

Strict consumption rules, properly scheduled inventories, regulations against the creation of reserves or changes in the destination of the resources we allocate to one site are some of the criteria we must apply with full rigor. To that effect, we will receive from you specific proposals to reduce assignments, and by their number and extent we will measure the rate of fulfillment. In particular, we must work faster

*continued on next page*

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**Santiago de Cuba Municipal Assembly nominates Fidel Castro as a representative to the National Assembly January 2008**



*continued from previous page*

to centralize transportation.

By saving we ensure a source of wealth only possible through discipline, ability and efficiency.

Absorbed as we are in the intensity of our work, I invite you to find some time to read, study and meditate about the problems of the world, the country, the province and the municipality. Think about how the world economy has been turned into a casino by the blind laws of the market; the impact of a superpower's hegemonic and selfish purposes; regional conflicts the world over; production and pricing trends; climate change; the advance of computer science, biotechnology and nanotechnology; the way some countries lag behind while others move forward...

One of your crucial obligations is to keep up with, think about and appraise a number of issues, including the features of socioeconomic development and the political situation in the provinces and municipalities that you manage, their birth and death rates, people's main pathologies, students' degree of devotion to their duties, labor discipline and productivity, youth employment rate, figures about migration, how much your municipality contributes to and spends from its budget, resource management, ability to meet people's most pressing

needs, and level of revolutionary morals, to name a few.

Your twofold duty as Constituency Delegates and Presidents of the People's Power's Councils are difficult and demanding, albeit encouraging and pivotal. Example above all else: if your conduct and that of your subordinate leaders is impeccable in and

out of your office, half the battle will be already won. Only by practicing what we preach will we be able to exert influence on people, curb corruption and work effectively.

Truth is to be sought by coming into contact with our people, for they are the ones who know what is really going on and can provide solutions to problems.

We must learn to listen, be ready at all times to hear someone's opinion, and stop in our tracks whenever we hear something different to what we thought.

Never lie about anything, significant or otherwise, under any circumstances. Not even phrases like «Tell them I'm not in», or «I'll meet with you later» if you don't actually intend to, or others along those lines can be justified, because that is how a leader's will to face up to the problems begins to fade and the airtight plating of their honesty begins to crumble.

Act quickly whenever possible: well and quickly outmatch well.

Our multiple tasks and the urgency of some of them should not make us look away from collective management: when taken by all together, a decision sets everybody's intelligence and skills in motion until its completion.

Sleeping less than 6 hours is held to be a cause

for obesity, and that is a risk to be avoided. Yet, as I reread [Cuban National Hero José] Martí's diary a few days ago I found these words: «sleeping is guilty for as long as something remains to be done».

Our people respect those who work, and prove to be understanding when they notice that the person who gives them an explanation grasp the essence of their problem and make it their own.

I will not go over our difficulties here and now. You know them and live with them; our media is increasingly covering them with great skill, while foreign media magnifies and multiplies them.

Regardless, the Revolution can be said to have made undeniable progress in these years of the new century when compared to the hardest years of the Special Period: power supply is more stable, we have more medicines and food, many schools and hospitals have been repaired, greater efforts have been made in the fields of construction and transportation, there have been improvements in water supply for a growing number of people, and so on, all in the midst of and despite a very difficult and complex international situation.

Last year our country spent 1,470 billion dollars to import 3,423,000 tons of foodstuffs. Importing the same amount at the current prices would mean an expenditure of 2,554 billion dollars, or a billion more than the previous year.

Last year we consumed 158,000 barrels of oil per day, for which we paid 8.7Million dollars. The same amount costs 32% more this year, that is, 11.6Million dol-

lars per day.

These are facts to bear in mind and explain, as they unavoidably affect our life and compel us to make economic adjustments. In capitalist countries this is a spontaneous phenomenon that spares no one, while in a socialist society the effects can be mitigated and controlled to protect some social groups, although they cannot be avoided. These realities are still unknown to many people, and others are aware of them but fail to link them to our problems. It is fair to expect our living conditions to improve, but in the meantime we must keep our feet on the ground. Only by working more, doing better, saving more and planning better will we carry out successfully.

Comrade Raúl recently called upon us to work hard. To close this meeting, where we have seen so much discussion about the problems we are yet to solve, the mistakes we are making, the goals we want to reach and the grave consequences of the increasing prices of the resources we import, I can think of no better way to finish than by saying these words: let's get down to it!

Homeland or Death,  
We shall overcome!

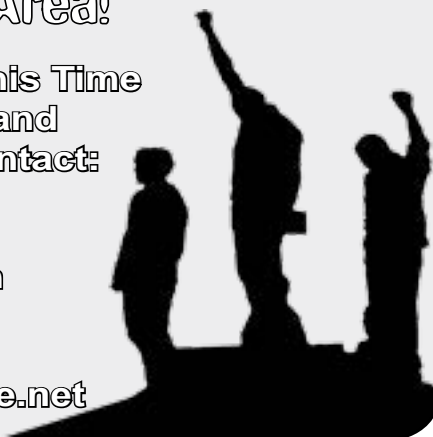


**Carlos Lage at the inauguration of a new electrical generation plant in Camagüey October 4 2007**

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- o Iraq
- o Palestine
- o Haiti
- o Quebec
- o Indigenous Nations
- o Labour Struggles

Contact Mobilization  
Against War & Occupation  
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FEATURING **MAGIA LOPEZ**  
**-DIRECT FROM CUBA!**  
 (MEMBER OF THE ACCLAIMED CUBAN HIP HOP  
 GROUP 'OBSESION' AND DIRECTOR OF  
 THE CUBAN AGENCY OF RAP)

**7TH GENERATION**  
**A-SLAM**  
**INFLUENTS**  
 ILL EAGLE  
 DISCREET DA CHOSEN 1  
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 NDIDI CASCADE  
 LADY DEANNA  
 OS12  
 NOW OR NEVER CREW  
 LOOSELEAF  
 JFLOWZ & DANIEL  
 DJ K-REC  
 JOOSE JUSTICE  
 PROJECT  
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 RAW CREW  
 BRITTANY B  
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 SPEECHES BEYOND

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 14TH ANNUAL  
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 WITH INDIGENOUS  
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**SEPTEMBER 20TH  
 SATURDAY 21ST**  
**FREE!**

**080920 SATURDAY 5:30 PM**  
**SUNRISE PAVILION SURREY**  
 10341 135 Street (Close to Whalley Library)  
 Close to Surrey Central Skytrain Station  
**080921 SUNDAY 1:00 PM**  
**VANCOUVER ART GALLERY**  
 750 Hornby Street (On Georgia Street Side)  
 Close to Granville Street Skytrain Station

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# **International Day of Action** **NO WAR ON IRAN!**

**MARCH & RALLY**  
**SATURDAY September 27**  
**2:00pm**

**Vancouver Art Gallery (Robson at Howe Street)**



**Call to Action in US by:**  
**StopwaronIran.org**

**Call to Action in Canada by:**  
**Mobilization Against War & Occupation (MAWO)**  
**& Iranian Community Against War (ICAW)**



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